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Mystical anthropology in Gregory of Nyssa's Homilies of the Song of Songs.

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MYSTICAL ANTHROPOLOGY
IN
GREGORY OF NYSSA'S HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS

BY
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THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE
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MYSTICAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN GREGORY OF NYSSA'S HOMILIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS

The Thesis is an attempt to explicate Gregory of Nyssa's mystical anthropology in one of his most mature of mystical writings, the Homilies to the Song of Songs.

Gregory's mystical anthropology draws its basis from his philosophical anthropology, and explores the implication of the nature and destiny of man in terms of the concept of divinisation or the transformation of human nature by the indwelling Christ. Gregory utilises the neo-Platonic concept of the ascent of the soul to its original perfection, but transforms this concept by the biblical doctrine of Grace and Incarnation. Holding to the unbridgeable gulf between the Created and the Uncreated, Gregory proposes the abandonment of all senses and entrance into the darkness where God is, and he postulates the divinisation of human nature without end based on that unbridgeable gulf. Gregory's philosophical anthropology would be incomplete without his mystical anthropology.

The divinisation of human nature does not imply an idiosyncratic idea of the soul in flight, "from the alone to the Alone". The soul, as Gregory understands it, is firmly attached to its ecclesiastical community, where it has its space-time existence in a life of imitating its Lord in his love for mankind. Its destiny is ultimately linked with the destiny of the body of Christ, the Church.

Gregory's concept is then compared with Origen's, whose ideas are said to have the most influence on Gregory's. Analysis shows that there are extrapolations of Origen's theology in Gregory's, but there are obvious discontinuities. The fact of the Incarnation is stressed by both writers, but the soul in Origen seems to pass beyond faith in the Incarnation in its ascent to God into the light of the full knowledge of God; whereas Gregory places his theology on the faith of the Incarnation throughout the soul's ascent, not into increasing light, but into increasing darkness where God is.

An illustration of Gregory's mystical anthropology can be detected in his other writing, the Life of Macrina, where he describes his sister using the familiar imageries from the Song of Songs i.e. virgin, bride, Thecla, refining gold and guidance to her ascetic community. Her ascent in perfection is also described in the language of the doctrine of Epektasis. Gregory seems to see in Macrina a real life paradigm for his mystical anthropology.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research into the Christian mystical doctrine of man began with the obsession to find out about the difference that being a Christian made to man's destiny and the conduct of his life on Earth. On this I have been helped by my supervisor, Dr. Graham Gould, in pointing a direction towards an investigation of Gregory of Nyssa's thought on this matter. I am profoundly grateful to Dr. Gould for his guidance, encouragement, patience and above all his sensitivity to my needs in times of distress and disappointment. I have found in him a worthy example in preparation for my future endeavours in similar field. I am equally grateful to the trustees of the King's College London Theological Trust for their generous grant which came just at the time of financial distress. I can only account for this as a divine providence.

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his prayer in helping Daddy complete his thesis. Yang Kuang's task was to ask Daddy how many pages he has written and thanked God for it before falling asleep at night.

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ABBREVIATIONS

I. JOURNALS AND ESSAYS

AJT	Anglican Theological Journal
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quartely
CH	Church History
DOP	Dumbarton Oaks Papers
ECQ	Eastern Churches Quarterly
GOTR	Greek Orthodox Theological Review
HJ	Heythrop Journal
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
JBL	Journal Biblical Literature
JLT	Journal of Litterrature and Theology
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
NS	New Series
PG	Patrologia graeca. J. Migne
SJT	Scottish Journal of Theology
SP	Studia Patristica
SVSP	St. Vladimir's Seminary Press
SVTQ	St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly
TS	Theological Studies
VC	Vigiliae Christianae

II. WORKS BY GREGORY OF NYSSA

The main text is Gregory's homilies on the Song of Songs, following:

- J W. Jaeger and H. Langerbeck (eds), *Gregorii Nysseni in Canticum Canticorum*, Leiden:Brill, 1960, vol 6.
English translation quoted throughout, C. MacCambley, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Mass.:Hellenic College Press, 1987.

Beat	De Beatitudinibus
CE	Contra Eunomium
Con Mac	Adversus Pneumatomachos Macedonianos
DAR	De anima et resurrectione
DHO	De hominis opificio
De Infant	De infantibus qui praemature abripiuntur
De Mort	De Mortuis
De Virg	De Virginitate
Hex	In Hexaemeron explicatio apologetica
In Eccles	In Ecclesiasten
In Perf	In Perfecta Christiani forma
In Psal	In inscriptiones Psalmorum
Moysis	De vita Moysis
Or Cat	Oratorio Catechetica magna
VSM	Vita Sanctae Macrinae

Origen's work quoted from R. P. Lawson, (trans) *Origen: The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies*, Westminster: Newman, 1957
(Lawson) and *Source Chrétiennes*, No: 375, 376, 37 bis

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

As persons, we are under a compulsion to be concerned with persons. To reject this concern is not only to reject the concern for identity but also more importantly for a fundamental error of judgement about value.¹ There are important questions which we need to find answers to and which will determine the path in which we will allow our lives to lead and aspire to. Questions such as: What exactly is involved in being a person? What is the true fulfillment of our personhood? What are the possibilities as yet latent with it? In short, who are we, and where are we going?

In Christian theology, the questions are answered in the context of the person of Christ. There is always an integral connection between the doctrine of man and the doctrine of Christ. Jesus Christ is *the* man, the model of what it means to for us to be human, yet not only as model, but as the transforming force in a redeemed person. Thus anthropology cannot be complete without soteriology, and in the Christian context, all aspects of theology turn finally and address the question of who Christ is and who he is for us as persons.

In the Age of the Fathers, theories of the person are not lacking. All aspire to define man in such a way as to give coherence to his personality and existential predicament, all address the problem of reality of the contemporaneous man and the distance or gulf of that reality with what he could aspire to be; i.e. all possess a theory of a "fall from grace" and the major philosophers of the day seek to point a path back to that "graceful"

state of what they persist as the original glory of man.

For Gregory, the philosophical categories of the time serve a dual purpose. The deliberate distancing from them serves to sharpen his forces on his specifically Christian themes; and the prevailing use of them by other thinkers in his day means that there is a medium in which he can make his thoughts intelligible and relevant. Much has been said about his Platonism² but Gregory adamantly intends to be called a Christian thinker, and with his involvement in ecclesiastical matters and especially with his brother, Basil's monastic community, he cannot but speak in overtly Christian terms, all be it, with a hellenic framework.

So it is with his anthropological formulations. Gregory unashamedly employs the philosophical speculations of the day, but couches them within the bounds of the teaching of Scripture.

In his treatment of man, Gregory, the philosopher, is determined to hold Scripture and reason together, and he sees the problem from two ends. First he seeks to explain the origin of the apparent contradiction between man's present state and that in which he was created. Then he finds a way of disclosing how God acts to resolve the situation. The basic question he asks is, "How can man, mortal, subject to passion, and short lived, be the image of the immortal, pure and eternal nature?"³ i.e. he is very much aware of the fact that man's present embodied existence is contradictory to his original nature. His tripartite division in *De Hominis Opificio* makes his concern very clear:

- i. Man's condition as it should and can be (1-15);

- ii. Man's condition as it is and the explanation for it (16-20) and
- iii. The resolution of man's situation by restoration to his original condition through resurrection (21-30).⁴

But what is novel in Gregory of Nyssa's anthropology is his combination of mediated knowledge of philosophy and immediate awareness of mystical experience, formulated as philosophical anthropology on the one hand, and also mystical anthropology on the other. But as Ladner aptly puts it, "To Gregory of Nyssa especially, philosophical and mystical anthropology really form one whole: philosophy to him is only a way of approach towards union with God, though an indispensable and an exalted way".⁵

A. THE SCOPE OF THE THESIS

Gregory's philosophical anthropology has invoked many fruitful studies⁶ and his mystical anthropology is explored in general by J. Daniélou and W. Völker.⁷ Our present investigation concentrates on his mystical anthropology as presented in his homilies on the Song of Songs, *In Canticum Cantorum*, one of his most mature works, drawing out all aspects and nuances in his allegorical interpretation of the Canticle text. In so doing, we are touching an aspect of prime importance which cannot be perceived fully by a patchwork quotation from this great work: The close link of his mystical anthropology with the text of the Canticle in a sequential order. Gregory does not choose his text arbitrarily, but utilizes

the flowing Biblical text in articulating his thought. Thus the Cantic text starts where man starts, at his fallen state, and the text progresses to a climax as the destiny of man is unfold till it reaches its glory, the union with the Bridegroom in love. It is our belief that Gregory's Mystical Anthropology must be studied in close, progressive relation to the canonical text in order to manifest the full implication of its meaning for mankind. The present thesis sets to prove just that.

B. METHODOLOGY

In the seventh and fourteenth Homilies, Gregory engages himself with the interpretation of the bridegroom's praise as applied to the ecclesiastical context. In describing the teeth or the jaw/cheeks, he allegorically interprets that to mean the Church's teaching ministry: "Just as material food is reduced into small pieces [by the teeth] for our stomach, there is a certain capacity in the soul which reduces teachings into small pieces, enabling it to comprehend them." [J224.3-6] Perceptive teachers are needed to reduce, "the divine mysteries into small fragments for a clearer interpretation of the text [and] make spiritual food more easily acceptable for the body of the Church". [J225.21-23] The divine mysteries are embedded in the canonical text, and by reducing it into small pieces, it not only releases the mysteries but makes it comprehensible for the path of perfection and virtue.

Our task here then is a modest one of reducing first the teachings in the homilies into small parts so as to crystallize the thoughts concerning

the nature and destiny of man as presented in *In Canticum Canticorum*.

Hence in Part One we first present Gregory's philosophical anthropology in so far as it gives light to his mystical contemplation of man. We shall endeavour to show that his doctrine of man which is developed philosophically is the basis for his mystical formulations; without which his mystical writing would make little sense; but it also mean that his philosophical anthropology will be incomplete without his mystical anthropology.

Part Two presents Gregory's flow of thought in such a way so as to avoid piecemeal quotations from the Homilies that may have a totally different connotation outside of their immediate context. By presenting Gregory's thought sequentially, we may observe a close link between text and interpretation in a new way and we can then see the unfolding of its implication for mystical anthropology. The subsections are meant to clarify Gregory's flow of thought through each Homily.

In Part Three we bring together various themes as explicated in the interpretation and analysis in Part Two. This serves to draw out aspects pertaining to Gregory's mystical anthropology.

The prime purpose of preaching on the text of the Song of Songs is variously described as, "to set forth in the Song of Songs... the ascent to perfection in an orderly fashion [J17.4-12]; to escort the soul, "to an incorporeal, spiritual and pure union with God" [J15.13-15]; to teach us, "the need for the soul to reach out to the divine nature's invisible beauty and to love it as much as the body is inclined to love what is akin to itself"

[J27.8-11] and also by the words in the Canticle, it teaches, "about the restoration of beauty from which she has departed". [J101.20 - 102.1]

Indeed Gregory does not depart from his main aim for his exposition of the Song of Songs. It is to be a guidebook for the restoration of humanity, the remaking of man. He describes this process by using mystical imageries of divine indwelling.

"Perfection", "union", "love" and "indwelling" pertain to immediate awareness of mystical experience where the soul is in direct contact with the One it pursues. The imageries of indwelling are employed because mediated knowledge of philosophy soon exhaust itself as the soul approaches the divine. But just as Gregory of Nyssa proposes that, "God's manifestation to the great Moses began with light, and after which he spoke through a cloud. Having risen higher become more perfect, Moses saw God in darkness"[J322], the journey of the soul first starts with its realization of its wretchedness, being illuminated by its contemplation of itself; it increasing realizes sense perceptions and philosophical contemplation can only bring it as far as God reveal himself through his work but especially the Incarnation, but the mechanics of that restoration of the human soul to the beauty which it has departed means the increasing abandonment of sense perceptions and enter into the darkness where faith and love rule, there it begins to comprehend itself and the potentiality of its glory. Another way of describing it is union with God in love as increasing participation in God is realized in the human soul. Yet another way is to say that the soul is increasing divinised.

Allegory works for Gregory in two different ways. It shows the material and immaterial can be blended, just as humility can be blended with the divine (this we will show in Chapter five). Secondly, allegory has the inherent aim of attempting to find a structure and a sequence in the canonical text, this serves Gregory well, as he attempts to present mystical anthropology in a sequential order through allegorical interpretation of the text of the Song of Songs.

It will become apparent that the Incarnation is the key concept in Gregory's interpretation of the Canticle text and in his presentation of his mystical anthropology. In Part Four, we compare briefly Gregory's spirituality with Origen's, who is said to have a profound influence on the Cappadocian Fathers as a whole, and Gregory of Nyssa in particular. Gregory willingly admits that his Homilies have a formidable precedent in Origen. Indeed both Fathers express their individual spirituality through the text of the Song of Songs, so it is not inappropriate to place their thoughts in such a way so as to bring out their distinctiveness and similarities by observing how they interpret the Canticle text.

In Part Four we then put Gregory's mystical anthropology, as presented in the Homilies on the Song of Songs, to the test by examining it in the context of his earlier work, *Vita Macrinae*. The life of Macrina is variously interpreted since its completion. Here we are concerned to find the link between Gregory's mystical anthropology and the life of his sister as presented by Gregory himself. That Macrina exerts a strong influence on his younger brother is beyond doubt. Gregory is even willing to present his

philosophy through the mouth of his dying sister, so profound is the influence of the character and life of Macrina. Thus we postulate that when Gregory lays out his mystical contemplation of man, Macrina's life must be one of the most important paradigms. Although there is no mention of her in the Homilies, we endeavour to prove this point in Chapter twelve.

But in themselves, Gregory of Nyssa's Homilies on the Song of Songs deserve deep appreciation, if only for the beauty of his language and imagination.

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1. Cf. D.E. Jenkins, *The Glory of Man*, London: SCM, 1967, 2-3.
2. See especially H.P. Cherniss, *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa* (Reprinted, NY: Burt Franklin, 1971).
3. DHO 16 PG44.18B.
4. It is interesting that very similar thought is uttered in recent times, e.g. P. Tillich, "These three considerations of human nature are present in all genuine theological thinking: essential goodness, existential estrangement, and the possibility of something, a 'third', beyond essence and existence, through which the cleavage is overcome and healed. Now, in philosophical terms, this means that man's essential and existential nature points to his theological nature," in *Theology of Culture* (Oxford; OUP 1959), p119.
5. G.B. Ladner, "The Philosophical Anthropology of Saint Gregory of Nyssa", DOP 12(1958), 62.
6. E.g. S. de Boer, *De anthropologie van Gregorius van Nyssa* (Van Gorcum & Co, 1968); G. Ladner, "Anthropology", art. cit; A.H. Armstrong, "The Nature of Man in St. Gregory of Nyssa", ECQ 8(1949), 2-9; Idem, "Platonic Elements in St. Gregory of Nyssa's Doctrine of Man", *Dominican Studies* 1(1948), 113-126; J.T. Muckle, "The Doctrine of Saint Gregory of Nyssa on Man as the Image of God", *Medieval Studies* 7(1945), 55-84; K.L. Balás, "Plenitudo Humanitatis: The Unity of Human Nature in the Theology of Gregory of Nyssa", In *Disciplina Nostra*, ed. D.F. Winslow, 115-33 (Mass: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979); H.U. von Balthasar, *Présence et pensée: Essai sur la philosophie religieuse de S. Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1942); J. Cavarnos, "The Relation of the Body and Soul in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa", in *Gregor von Nyssa und die Philosophie*, ed. H. Dorrie, M. Altenburger and U. Schramm (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 61-78.
7. J. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique: Doctrine spirituelle de saint Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris: Aubier, 1944); W. Völker, *Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1955).

PART I

PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

CHAPTER ONE

THE NATURE AND DESTINY OF MAN: PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF GREGORY OF NYSSA

The question of whether Gregory of Nyssa is a true philosopher is beside the point. Gregory is interested only in the defense and outworking of the Christian way of life and is prepared to use whatever means available to achieve that end, to illuminate and to lead others in persuasive arguments and imaginative speculation, so as to reach the εὐσέβεια or true worship of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God, as revealed in Jesus Christ the Incarnate Lord. So he is prepared to use the world view and religious speculations of the philosophy of the day, the teachings and text of the Bible and mystical imaginings.¹ But most Gregorian scholars would insist that Gregory works in^a Neo-platonic atmosphere but breathes out a fresh Christian breath that, depending on prejudice, pollutes or refreshes it.²

Gregory of Nyssa's theological anthropology is no less influenced by the philosophy of the day. This comes as no surprise as Gregory, in the formulation of his theology, has two general tasks to fulfill.³ He must present Christianity in such a way that it is at par with, if not above, the sophistication of the classical culture and he is compelled to use the prevailing language and thought systems in order to formulate a theology that is both relevant and unique to his age. So it is with his anthropology. Again it should come as no surprise that Gregory of Nyssa does not depend

on one thought system, although the Platonic tradition is important for him in formulating his anthropology, but he uses what comes as supportive to his formulation, thus it becomes notoriously difficult to pin-point his philosophical precedents.

Cherniss insists that Gregory merely applied Christian connotation to Platonic doctrine and called it Christian Theology.⁴ But A. Meredith, I think, has convincingly in many occasions refuted that statement⁵ and thinks that with Gregory, the prevailing language of philosophy is merely a tool, all be it a necessary one, to explicate what he thinks to be the teaching of Scripture and Christian tradition. His is a philosophically contextualized theology not hellenized Christian thought.

So it is much of the integration of prevailing thought system and Gregory's understanding of Scripture and Christian tradition that governs his thought on the nature and destiny of man.⁶

At the centre of the interest of the Greek Fathers in the world around them stood man, mainly because his position in the natural order was seen to be central to the whole of creation. Man is inextricably linked to his natural environment and yet is strangely above it. Although he feels the weight of his humanness, he also feels an unmistakable liberty to transcend it.

The unique status of man comes from a few observable differences between himself and other created beings: man's nature to stand upright, his lack of defence from cold and predators, his dexterous hands, all these serve their purpose of showing not his weakness but his capacity to tame

and co-operate with other creatures which are providentially adapted to serve him, this is his divinely ordained royal status and skill.⁷

What Heathen writers referred to of man as microcosm, Gregory of Nyssa scorns as a ludicrous treatise for it would reduce man to the status of a gnat or a mouse.⁸ According to the doctrine of the Church, founded on the Biblical text of Gen. 1:27, man's greatness consists not in his likeness to the created world but in his being in the image of his creator.

In Gregory of Nyssa's writings, the appreciation of nature and especially the human body is never lacking. A catalogue of his interest in the investigation of the physical world would disband any notion that Gregory thinks the world evil and therefore should be kept at an ascetic distance. Subjects of his interest range from Astronomy and Cosmology⁹, Meteorology¹⁰, Botany and Horticulture¹¹. Gregory also has special interest in the anatomy of man.¹² His knowledge no doubt was adopted by the Stoic, Galen.¹³

Gregory's theological investigation of the nature and destiny of man occurs in most of his writings, but three works especially deal with these issues in a more thorough manner: *De Hominis Opificio*; *De Anima et Resurrectione*; and *Oratio Catechetica*. So it is with these texts in mind that we will see how he formulates his anthropology and how this anthropology becomes the basis for his mystical theology.

The view of man's origin and destiny also influences the picture of man's ideal being and present behaviour. Gregory's anthropology uses these concepts and expresses them in terms of diastema, akolouthia, image and

likeness and freedom.

1.1 THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE CREATED AND UNCREATED

On creation, Gregory certainly rejects any notion of the attempts of the pagan philosophers to explain the coming into being of things by emanation from the Divine Substance or by the hypothesis of an eternally pre-existing uncreated matter.¹⁴ There is no Platonic idea of a descending hierarchy of divine beings.¹⁵

Balthasar commented that, "every time he undertakes a development of the fundamentals of his metaphysics, Gregory begins from the irreducible opposition between God and creature".¹⁶ The Created depends on God to subsist by participating in the inexhaustible source of being. "But if it turns away from this source with a desire to belong to itself, it no longer merits the name of being. This profoundly ontological privation of being is sin which is veritably an annihilation (ἐξονδένωσις)."¹⁷ Thus one important way of defining the creation is by saying what it is not or other than the divine; "It is precisely through its comparison and union with the Creator that it is other than him."¹⁸ There is no point of contact between the soul and God, and so God is totally unknowable to the soul, and the soul can have no experience of God except in so far as God makes such experience possible.¹⁹

Scholars have alerted attention to Gregory's usage of the word

διαστήμα or διαστάσις in envisaging the distinctiveness of the Creator and also his creature and the special relationship between them.²⁰ What is other than the Creator in man is expressed in terms of *diastema*, what Gregory himself says boldly as το διαστήμα οὐδεν ἄλλο ἢ κτίσις ἐστίν (diastema is nothing other than creation).²¹ Gregory starts with the common question of man as man on Earth and finds his answer by διαστήμα both backwards and forwards. The very fact that there is this διαστήμα means that there is a history and an eschatology to the investigation of man on earth. In Gregory's view, the present state of man is tolerable in as much as in the beginning it was different and in the future it would be different.

What can be perceived is the lack of διάστημα in the divine οὐσία but is what makes up the human subject. In Anti-Arian/Eunomian controversy, it becomes the key term to attack on the dictum, "there was a then when the son was not," where an internal temporally or spatially would have to be assumed between the origin of the Father and the origin of the Son²² and for that matter the origin of Holy Spirit. Gregory who rejects the Plotinian affirmation of continuity between the one and the cosmos²³ and that time is generated by the soul's separated existence and thus is temporary and will cease when the soul is reunited with God.²⁴

The concept of διαστήμα must not be overlooked, the fact that no διαστήμα exists in the divine Trinity and is seen in man (the created) makes it all the more important in Gregory's formulation of the Uncreated/Created dichotomy. The extension or limitation means that it is

"a duration not an eternal 'now', and that it is other than the infinite totality of being which is God".²⁵ This διαστήμα triggers a movement towards the infinite goodness which is God himself, and because the finite cannot contain the infinite all at once, it must go on without end as there is no end with God.²⁶

This distinction between the Created and the Uncreated is crystallized in Gregory's thought system during the Eunomian Controversy.²⁷ This distinction is superimposed on the traditional formulation of the intelligible and the sensible.²⁸ The sensible can be characterised by the definite qualities of the objects that are present to the mind. But for intelligible, some other method of differentiation is required. The Uncreated is the source of all good, while the created is dependent on that good for its very existence.²⁹ The intelligible in the created can then be perceived by the degree of inclination to the good, determined by free-will. But the Uncreated has no such distinctions, as it is in full possession of the good.

So the whole realm of existence can be supremely divided into the Created and the Uncreated,³⁰ with the Created further divided into the sensible and the intelligible.³¹

However, the divisions and subdivision between the Uncreated and the Created, between the intelligible and the sensible bring out a very complex notion, especially in terms of philosophical anthropology. Mosshammer sees a clear progression in Gregory's thought in trying to come to terms with this thought systems as he faces different philosophical

issues of his day.³²

In Gregory's earlier works,³³ he places more emphasis on the distinction between the intelligible and the sensible. The gulf between the Created and the Uncreated is not so wide. God and the human soul are related in terms of image and archetype, and on the principle of like to like, the soul can rise from the lower to the upper world, by imitation and self-purification.³⁴ The intelligible includes the intelligible objects, intelligent beings, the human soul and is in direct polar opposite to the sensible. The face of the intellectual nature in man comes through the act of prohaeresis.³⁵

And it is with this act of prohaeresis that makes it necessary for more refined formulation is his later writing. In his *De Homini Opificio*, he introduces the notion of created freedom as distinct from divine, uncreated freedom.³⁶ The human mind is differentiated from its Creator by its createdness but related closely to him as image to archetype.³⁷ The notion of created freedom is introduced in order to account for its perverse notions, subjecting itself to sin and death. In the third book against Eunomius, Gregory defines the difference within the intellectual nature between the absolute will of the Creator and the contingent freedom of the creature. The creaturely nature is such that it moves itself in the middle of good and evil, by an act of prohaeresis, it either chooses to be a child of God or the son of perdition. But the Uncreated is one, simple and unchanging good. The contingent freedom of the created is such that, unlike the absolute will of the Uncreated, it can never fully be in possession of the

good.³⁸ Gregory also defines the distinction between the Created and Uncreated by the fact of change.³⁹ Putting these two concept^s together, we can only conclude that for the Created, we see that although "freedom would seem to entail the possibility of change, Gregory sees change itself as a limitation of freedom".⁴⁰

And this distinction between the Created and Uncreated becomes the basis for all of Gregory's idea of the nature and the eventual destiny of man.

1.2 THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD

The emphasis in Gregory of Nyssa on the distinction of the Created and Uncreated introduces the concept of διαστήμα into his anthropology. This concept, as we have seen serves to safeguard his concept of God as totally different from his creatures. But if this is pushed to the extreme, it will eventually reach a concept of total unknowability of God and frustrate the human quest for meaning in existence. But another concept is introduced to counter balance this danger, which is thoroughly biblical in its formulation, but not entirely foreign to Greek philosophical concept of the quest of the human soul for the One that attracts it based on their inherent likeness.⁴¹

The concept of the image and likeness of God is of course based on Genesis 1:26-28, the text which is so richly used by all early Christian writers to formulate the nature of man and his relation to the divine.

Gregory of Nyssa writes his treatise *De Hominis Opificio* after his

exposition of the six days of creation, which is meant to pick up where his brother, Basil, left off. But as we will see, his conception of the nature of man as image and likeness is far removed from Basil's. Concerning Gen. 1:26, Basil, following Origen, insists that the body has no part in the image/likeness formulation of the nature of man;⁴² and that there is a clear distinction between image and likeness.⁴³ The image of God in man, according to Basil, is the gift of God to created humanity and by the process of synergism, of the action of the Holy spirit and human free choice, man's ascent to the perfection, which is the likeness to God.⁴⁴

For Gregory of Nyssa, the central question in Christian anthropology is the hope of man. It is thus necessary to investigate man's distinctiveness and why he came to be what he is to-day, thus pointing the pathway to hope that is inherent in himself. Man as the image and likeness of God becomes a concept of prime importance for his formulation of man's journey to future hope, for man's distinctiveness lies in his being created "in the image and likeness of God", and the suffering that he subsequently ensures comes from his free use of that distinctiveness, and the future becomes a quest to restore that image and likeness in himself.

Two things do stand out in Gregory's doctrine of man as the image of God: the fact that the image and the term likeness are one and the same and by image, the term "imitation" immediately comes to mind. The fact that he uses image and likeness interchangeably helps in his mystical speculation of man's nature and destiny.⁴⁵ Just like the Platonic person imitates the idea of goodness in so far as he is good, Gregory's doctrine of

man has the image imitating the prototype in "all sense imitations of the corresponding goods in God."⁴⁶ This is radically different from Basil's (and thus earlier Patristic) idea that the image of God leads to likeness in the moral growth of man.⁴⁷ In this sense, God-likeness exists in creation not in a germinal state, as Irenaeus would see it⁴⁸ but is in full-existence in the creational εἰκὼν. This helps to explain Gregory's thought on the original state of man before the Fall. This is important because man will have to realize what state he was before that Fall before ascending to the original state. Thus growth of man after the Fall is not into that likeness with God, but an ascent back to the recovery of that likeness. This is consistent with Gregory's insistence that man should know himself⁴⁹ before the journey to the full restoration of his past glory. Gregory is therefore the first to "attribute to man full ὁμοίωσις θεῷ not only at the end, but at the beginning of his history".⁵⁰

A most important doctrine pertaining to the image of God is that of man's capability to participate in God.⁵¹ In *Oratio Catechetica*, Gregory relates the two concepts thus,

"Thus, then, it was needful for man, having come to be for the enjoyment of divine Good, to have something in his nature akin (συγγενές) to that in which he is to participate (μετέχονον). For this end he has been furnished with life, with reason, with wisdom, and with all the excellences that we attribute ... In truth this has been shown in the comprehensive utterance of one expression, in the description of the cosmogony, where it is said that the human was made 'in the image of God.' For in this likeness(ὁμοίωσει), implied in the word image(εἰκόνα), there is a summary of all things that characterize the Divine ..."⁵²

So the divine image is given as the foundation within the nature of

man which makes participation in God possible. The image is itself participation as well as the capacity to participate, making it a dynamic process of becoming more and more like God through ever increasing participation in him. Two important implications come out of this: Firstly, the kinship of image and archetype both enable participation of lower level of reality with the higher and also distinguishes them. Likeness is derived.⁵³ And secondly it means that the dynamic process of participation knows no end as God is eternal and infinite.⁵⁴ This in fact provides one of the most important bases for Gregory's mystical anthropology.⁵⁵

Gregory of Nyssa also, in his work, *De Virginitate*, sees intellect and free will as essential attributes of that which is "in the image", while in his book *De Hominis Opificio*, he applies it to the host of corporeal and spiritual gifts with which God has enriched mankind.

Man is first created to be in the state of apatheia like his prototype, and Gregory defines this as the attributes contained in the image: purity, freedom from passion, blessedness, departure from all evil and all such like, all these pertain to the likeness of the divinity.⁵⁶ But he particularly singles out for special emphasis three communicated attributes, which are also the special emphasis in his mystical anthropology, namely, reason, freedom and immortality.

Immortality is a prerogative of man's nature through his being made to the image of God; from the beginning man was to be the lord of earthly creation and so by his likeness to the Supreme King he was made a living image of the archetype; his sceptre is the blessing of immortality.⁵⁷ Man

is to enjoy all the goods in God; and to know them he must have something akin to each of them in himself as only like knows like. One of the goods in God is eternity; it was necessary then that "the formation of our nature should not be without a share in this too but have in itself immortality ... These (truths) the account of the origin of the world makes clear by the comprehensive expression of one phrase: that man was made to the image of God."⁵⁸ The fact that man now faces the horror that is death speaks to us that attribute is lost due to the exercise of freedom contrary to man's true aspiration.

Reason and freedom work together. Because freedom is an attribute of God, if the image of God is authentically an image, man must also be characterised by freedom. The aspect of freedom that is most emphasised is that of self-determination. In *De Hominis Opificio*. it is stated that the soul "has no master, and is self-governed, swayed in a self-ruling way by its own choice."⁵⁹ Its activity always remain self-initiated.⁶⁰

Reason distinguishes the true from the apparent good, but it is man's will that decides which is to embrace. All depends on the sway in his will, his destiny and his strife to reach that destiny.

The ambiguity of free-will, i.e. in order for it to be truly free is that it must have the full rein in choosing either good or evil.⁶¹ At the state of fallen, man retains his use of mind and free will. It is through a process of Catharsis that he gains his former state.⁶² Gregory states emphatically that it is in our power to be what we will.⁶³ This fact is important for his mystical anthropology, it is with this freedom to choose that gives back the

full responsibility of the ascent of the soul both as a possibility and a duty to itself.

1.3 THE FALL AND THE RESTORATION OF MAN

Man is sovereign because God, in whose image he was created, is the almighty Lord and King: "The fact that our nature is an image of the Nature which rules over all things, means nothing else than this, that from the start our nature was created sovereign."⁶⁴ He is free because he is an image of absolute self-determination. "In the self-determination of free choice, he possessed the likeness of the Sovereign of all, for he was not subject to any external necessity but guided by his own will towards what is fitting and chose independently what pleased him."⁶⁵

But the actual condition of man as such does not reflect the divine image, "How can man, mortal, subject to passion, and short-lived, be the image of the immortal, pure and eternal nature?"⁶⁶ The mere mention of mortality in man negates whatever is stated about man being created in the divine image which is immortal.⁶⁷

There is a great difference between that which is conceived in the archetype, and a thing which has been made in its image: for the image is properly called if it keeps its resemblance to the prototype; but if the imitation be perverted from its subject; the thing is something else, and no longer an image of the subject.⁶⁸

By saying, "in the image of God", this is the same as to say that He

made human nature participant in all good, and this is His image, then the image finds its resemblance to the Archetype in being filled with all good.⁶⁹ And when this is put together with the concept of perversion, we see — there emerges a doctrine of sin and redemption. The perversion of the original image is sin in the sense that it is the turning away from the inexhaustible source of being "with a desire to belong to itself",⁷⁰ the ontological privation of being is sin. But the fact that it is made in that image incurs the participation in that inexhaustible source of being, not only possible, but can become a reality is the practice of goodness in observed.

Gregory of Nyssa subscribes to the doctrine of double creation, in which the creation of man as male and female was a definite divine foreknowledge, anticipating the event of the Fall.⁷¹ He describes a two-stage creation of man by turning to Gen.1:27. The original creation of man is a creation of man-in-totality,⁷² not an individual, sexuality is a consequent concession to the fallen state of man which God foreknew. The perversion of the original image is the fall into sin. But divine foreknowledge comes with providence, and procreation is that provision. Gregory see this as God's intention for a definite number of humans to be generated so that humanity itself will reach its proper perfection, i.e. as a full restoration of the original image. Once this full compliment is reached, the generative process will cease and every individual will be brought to perfection.⁷³

The simplest description of man's fall and the possibility of rising

again is presented: in his earliest work, De Virginitate, later other elements are added as we will indicate, but this scheme remains roughly consistent throughout.

Gregory first states his scheme thus: "We who in our first ancestor were thus rejected, are allowed to our earliest state of blessedness by the very same stages by which we lost Paradise." It is the goal of each person to become like God. Since humanity was first created according to the image and likeness of God, the end is essentially a restoration of the beginning.⁷⁴ We shall quote from chapter 12 of *De Virg*⁷⁵, the steps are self-explanatory:

I. The Fall as being clothed with the Perishables

"[Man] has fallen from his proud birthright ... so this creature has fallen into the mire of sin and lost the blessing of being an image of the imperishable Deity; he has clothed himself instead with a perishable and foul resemblance to something else."

II. The Removal of Perishables is the first step to Restoration

"The earthly envelopment once removed, the soul's beauty will again appear. Now the putting off of a strange accretion is equivalent to the return to that which is familiar and natural; yet such a return cannot be but by again becoming that which is the beginning we were created ... This likeness to the divine is not our work at all it is the great gift of God ... human efforts can only go so far as to clear away the filth of sin, and so

caused the buried beauty of the soul to shine forth again ..."

III. Marriage, the last stage of Separation

"Marriage then, is the last stage of our separation from the life that was led in Paradise; marriage, therefore, as our discourse has been suggesting is the first thing to be left. It is the first station as it were for our departure to Christ."⁷⁶ Gregory seems to abandon this stage in his later works. The only possible explanation is that, this being his earliest work and written for his brother's ascetic community, he views the renouncement of marriage as an exhortation to asceticism not as doctrine.

IV. Steps towards Restoration

- (a) Retire from anxiety and toil.
- (b) Divest ourselves of those coverings of nakedness i.e. wisdom of the flesh.
- (c) Denounce all secret sins, and no longer covered with the fig-leaves of this bitter world.
- (d) Repel illusion of taste and sight, only strife to obey God's commandment.

V. The Last Stage - Union with God

"To enjoy the Good in its purity, unmixed with one particle of evil; and to enjoy that, is in my judgement nothing less than to be ever with God, and to feel ceaselessly and continually this delight, unalloyed by aught that

could tear us away from it. One might even be bold as to say that this might be found the way by which a man could be again caught up into Paradise."

Gregory's concept of sin, it seems to be, is not as well defined as, say, in Augustine. J.J. O'Keefe points out that "Gregory never adequately articulated a plausible explanation for sin"⁷⁷ and that the reason lies in his failure "to articulate a doctrine of human moral culpability residing in an independent and autonomous free will".⁷⁸ O'Keefe claims that Gregory inherits the Greek frame of mind in stating failure as ignorance, not the weakness of the will, conversely proper moral behaviour comes through correct knowing.⁷⁹ Greek thoughts define the reality of error in terms of passions (παθός) that hinders the intellect from knowing good. Passions are associated with materiality, this implies the abhorrence of human physically.⁸⁰ But to say with some scholars⁸¹ that he ignores the notion of original sin is to miss the point, and forcing us to look at Gregory's work from Augustinian viewpoint. Gregory probably sees the concept as cosmic fallenness. This fallenness is not expressed in terms of divine punishment inflicted upon all mankind from parents to children as such, but rather in terms of tyranny exercised by Satan.⁸² In De Vita Moysis⁸³ he says, "There is a doctrine ... which says that after our nature fell into sin, God did not disregard our fall and withhold his providence. No, on the one hand, he appointed an angel with incorporeal nature to help in the life of each person, and on the other hand, he also appointed the corruptor who, by an

evil and maleficent demon, afflicts the life of man and contrives against our nature." Humans are seen more as victims of the universal reign of death, so what is transmitted from parent to child is not sin but mortality and slavery. This is consistent with his concept of evil,⁸⁴ not only as a withdrawal from the good, but a fall into non-being, and yet not in a static sense as such, but a "motion towards non-subsistence, a reversal of the course towards being."⁸⁵ And the ultimate expression of this non-subsistence is death. Gregory expresses this by saying that a "Garment of Skin" is placed over man's true nature, implying that the real self is something other than the fleshly existence. "The 'garment of skins' are not bodily existence per se, for man had a body in Paradise, but animality or biological existence. The garments include the passions, sexuality, and especially mortality, which are added to the human nature made in the image of God."⁸⁶ What is keeping the believer from ascending into union with God is the fact that man is inevitably tied down to matter, which acts as "an impediment to spiritual progress which imposes a downward drag on the christian as he attempts to higher things".⁸⁷ But if death is the ultimate degradation of mankind, the cosmic enemy, then Christ is the saviour precisely because he conquers death. In his philosophical anthropology the role of Christ is important in so far as man's salvation depends on Christ's redemptive work, it is when we come to examine his mystical that we see the ascent of man in the spiritual things must be anchored on the Incarnation.⁸⁸ The restoration of the Image, in part, begins with Christ offering the potentiality of this ascent through faith, till

immortality is reclaimed, and man is caught up into an on-going integration, "a transformation into the ever simpler image of God's infinite unity."⁸⁹ It is here that Gregory's theology is taken up, or integrated into his spirituality.

Mosshammer's insistence upon the total distinction, in Gregory's thought, between the Created and the Uncreated, concludes with man in the middle, what he terms the double antithesis in Gregory's work. Reality is divided into the sensible and the intelligible and the intelligible is again divided into created and uncreated. So man's existential situation is such that he is constituted by the sensible and the created intelligible, he becomes the point of contact between the sensible and the intelligible. This, as we have seen above, is providential by the theory of double creation. But the relation between the soul and the body in man becomes the issue in which the sensible and the intelligible in man play out their part in defining man as he is now and how he can be transformed.

1.4 THE RELATION BETWEEN THE BODY AND THE SOUL

The understanding of the relation of the soul and body is pivotal in understanding Gregory's anthropology. "For Gregory of Nyssa ... the knowledge of the soul and the manner in which it operates in the body has a profound bearing on the ideas of perfection and salvation as well as a man's well-being and thinking."⁹⁰

Traditionally the Platonic dualism refers to the division between the

ideal world and the world of changing, sensible things⁹¹ and involves the separation of soul and body as distinguished from^{the} Aristotelian position of the combination of soul and body, and this is, in turn, distinct from the neo-Platonic view.⁹²

Gregory's definition of the soul is complex and reminds of Platonic formulation: "a created, living, rational being, transmitting from itself to an organised and sentient body the power of living and of grasping the objects of sense".⁹³

As this is not the place to examine exhaustively the body-soul relationship, we shall attempt a summary of the main ideas which affect Gregory's mystical interpretation of the nature and destiny of man.

1.4.1 The Simultaneous Beginning of Body and Soul

One theory governs Gregory's concept of the relationship between the body and the soul: the simultaneous beginning of body and soul. He states in *De Hominis Opificio*, that "Since man is one, his being consisting of soul and body, it is to be supposed that the beginning of his existence is one and common to both parts".⁹⁴ This brings the body into the constitution of the image of God. But with the body comes passions and the danger when man succumbs to its prompting. This is rendered more difficult to comprehend as man was originally created into a state of apatheia.

The term apatheia in Gregory does not mean the absence of all passions.⁹⁵ In man the passions with their appetites and tendencies are a

part of man's being in virtue of his being human, but they are not in the image in man. Passions then are unavoidable, but apatheia, however, follows as the soul is turned to the service of virtue.⁹⁶ Therefore the process of catharsis is to reach the state of freedom from all affection for things not God. Nevertheless passion is a reality in man in virtue of his being human and man must realise this in order for him to search for the path back to his original state of apathetic existence. This has profound effect on Gregory's thought on the final restoration of man as the resurrection of body is assumed in Christian theology and Scripture.⁹⁷

1.4.2 The body is held together by the soul

The soul binds together (συνδέει στοιχεῖα) the elements of the body.⁹⁸ The soul naturally develops an intimate knowledge during its earthly life of the atoms with which it is united, that it is able to remain with them when they are scattered after the body's dissolution, because of its non-spatial (ἀδιάστατον) character, that it continues to possess an awareness of even the precise place that each atom previously occupied in the body and that, at the resurrection, at God's command, it will exert the force upon the atoms necessary to bring them together again.⁹⁹

In an interesting observation on the body of man that is eaten by fish after drowning, Gregory seems at first to be content to leave the solution of the fate of that body in God's hands, but a little later he adds that just as a common herd of cattle can be divided among its several owners, so the

soul will be able to attract its scattered bodily elements, wherever they may be.¹⁰⁰ The resurrected body is a case in point. Whatever changes the human body undergoes before death, the risen body bears with it its own tokens of identity.¹⁰¹ If there is any true continuity between the earthly and the risen body, then matter, of which the former is composed, cannot be intrinsically evil.¹⁰²

1.4.3 The soul pervades the body and controls it

Gregory speaks of the "mobility" of the soul as against the body.¹⁰³ Place is a property of body only, and the soul, being immaterial, is by no necessity of its nature detained in any place. For all practical purposes, for Gregory, the words "soul and "mind" are interchangeable.¹⁰⁴ So it is, when Gregory makes mention of the mind pervading the entire organism, and the human body is made to be used as an instrument by it,¹⁰⁵ it means that the soul is not restricted to any part of the body, but is equally in touch with the whole, producing its motion according to the nature of the part which is under its influence. And the soul, which is the governing principle, commands and the body executes what it is ordered to do. But this is not a haphazard arrangement, for the mind is regulated by God, if departs from it, it loses power of activity: "In the compound nature of man, the mind is governed by God, and that by it is governed our material life, provided the latter remains in its natural state, but if it is perverted from nature it is alienated also from that operation which is carried on by the mind."¹⁰⁶

However when each part of the soul carries out its own particular duties and actually co-operates with the other parts instead of interfering with their activities, produces order or virtue. Here the concept of man as body and soul is combined with the concept of free will. Because freedom in man, as in God, is self-initiated it falls on the man to produce that order and virtue which he aspires to. But in the nature of things, man follows his own impulse and allows vice to take over.

1.4.4 Mind and Passions

As we have noted above, for Gregory, the passions in man, with their appetites and tendencies are a part of man's being in virtue of his being human. So when Gregory speaks of the soul "being pulled down by the body"¹⁰⁷ he seems to be saying that the body actively leads the soul toward vice and is responsible for this confusion. We must note, however, that he explicitly states that the inclination toward the material is from a prejudgment and not from the body itself. The body can only pull the soul down if the soul allies itself with the body through a misunderstanding of its own nature and the nature of the body. Thus the key to the liberation of the soul from the body lies not in fighting the desire of the body as such but in correcting this misunderstanding in the soul. The soul becomes mixed with the body whenever it seeks immortality through the body.

The non-rational part of man manifests itself in the form of passions, and "they are not allotted to man's life for any evil purpose, but such

movements of the soul become instruments either of virtue or vice according to the use free-will makes of them".¹⁰⁸ If reason is in control over these elements, then none of them will be in the service of evil, "fear will foster obedience, anger will foster courage, timidity will foster caution, and the appetitive impulse will foster in us the divine and untarnished pleasure".¹⁰⁹ If reason loses its rein then life becomes brutish, thus is dragged down and becomes gross, "For when a man draws down his mental energy to the irrational and forces his reason to become the servant of his passions, there is effected a transformation of the good character to the image of the irrational ... But on the contrary, if reason assumes sway over such movements, each of them is changed to a form of virtue ... every such movement when raised up by loftiness of mind is conformed to the beauty of the divine image".¹¹⁰

The nature of man, especially in De Anima et resurrectione concentrates, is on the opposing powers of the rational in the image of God in man, and the irrational animal impulse, neutral in itself but when out of rational control, is transformed into corrupting passion.¹¹¹

The emphatic statement of R. Williams that, "whatever Gregory believed, it was not that the human subject consisted of a rational core with some embarrassing additions,"¹¹² immediately makes us aware of the complexity in Gregory's thought on the rational/irrational dichotomy.

Foremost in Gregory's formulation concerning the human subject is to treat the affective life as an instrument.¹¹³ Impulse is not wrong in itself, as long as it is under the rein of the rational or be taught to serve the

proper ends of a reasoning being.¹¹⁴ It is when impulse degrades into passions that it becomes the leader not the instrument that things go away, it becomes passion serving the immediate goals of self-preservation and gratification of material needs, thus unable to serve and sustain the life of a distinctively reasonable subject.¹¹⁵ Instead of being a support system for a life of contemplating and realising the good it became self-seeking and debases reason.¹¹⁶ Thus the impulse must be made to serve the mind in order that the impulses would not be corrupted into passions.

We shall argue that by formulating the doctrine of man in this way will make Gregory's anthropology but a subset of the prevailing philosophical speculation, but without this formulation it would be impossible to make sense of Gregory's thought pattern. It is when Gregory puts an increasing emphasis on the indwelling and incarnate Christ in his doctrine of man that it can truly be called Christian. And this he does in his mystical anthropology.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. See T.P. Verghese, "Διασθημα and διαστασις in Gregory of Nyssa. Introduction to a Concept and Posing of a Problem," in *Gregors von Nyssa und Die Philosophie*, p.244; see also Ladner, "Philosophical Anthropology", 62.
2. Cf. Verghese, p.257.
3. J. Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993) uses two categories to circumscribe this encounter: apologetics as resistance to absorption by Hellenic culture and presupposition as validate the status of Christianity in classical culture.
4. E.g. DAR PG46.49C ff. for idea of the soul = Rep. 611c, Phaedo 80b.; DHO PG44.161, for omnipresence of the soul = Enneads IV.3.8, 8.1.
5. E.g. A. Meredith, "The Concept of Mind in Gregory of Nyssa," SP 22(1989), 35-38 where he argues that the authority of Scriptures surpasses the philosophic tool that Gregory uses to explicate his anthropology.
6. Space and purpose do not allow for full investigation on the alleged influence of various classical traditions that Gregory calls to mind, but enough materials are now available on this to indicate Gregory's debt.
7. DHO PG 44.140D ff.
8. DHO PG44.177D.
9. Cf. Antirrheth. C.E. XII 6; De infant; De virg 11, in Hex. PG 44, 96d-97a; CE VIII.1 etc.
10. Cf. in Hex PG44.93B-D, in fact the composition of in Hex. gives Gregory opportunity to explore his fascination for the created nature around him.
11. In Hex PG44.64B; for a detailed catalogue of the Patristic naturalist interest, see D.S. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Greek Patristic View of Nature* (Manchester: MUP, 1968), pp.1-39.
12. See D.S. Wallace-Handrill, *Ibid*, pp.40-65.

13. Ibid. p.46-48, see also R. Williams, "Macrina's Deathbed Revisited: Gregory of Nyssa on Mind and Passion," in *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, ed. L.R. Wickham and C.P. Bammel (Leiden:Brill 1993), p227.
14. DAR PG46.121, see A.H. Armstrong, "Nature of Man in St. Gregory of Nyssa,"3.
15. CE I, PG45.333 ff.
16. Balthasar, *Présence*, p27 quoting In Cant.6, PG44.885C=J174; CE I, PG45.333C-D; CE VIII PG45.793CD- 796A.
17. Ibid., quoting Moysis, PG44.333AB; 381B; In Psal 2.14; PG44.586B and 2.15; PG 44.595C; In Eccles 5; PG44.681C; 7; PG44.725B; In Psal 1.8 PG44.479AB.
18. CE I PG45.368C.
19. A.Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition. From Plato to Denys*, (Oxford:Clarendon 1981), p81.
20. Cf. Balthasar, *Présence*, pp.1-10 (E. trans, pp.27-35); P. mar Gregorios, *Cosmic Man. The Divine Presence: The Theology of St. Gregory of Nyssa*,(NY:Paragon House 1988) pp.67-99; T.P. Verghese, "Διαστήμα and διαστασις", pp.243-260. For pre-Gregorian Greek usages, see mar Gregorios, op. cit. pp.67-75, we shall not trace this etymology here to save space, but it is interesting to note that Mar Gregorios thinks that the Stoics were perhaps the first to use these terms in a philosophical sense; See also Verghese, art.cit. pp.246-8.
21. In Eccles. 7; PG44.729c, διαστήμα's exact definition is difficult, T.P. Verghese attempts it this way: "The verb means normally *to divide* or *to separate* in the transitive and *to pause* or *to stop* or *to move away*, in the intransitive. The noun τὸ διάστημα can mean a) a standing apart; b) extended or distended existence; c) a gap or interval; d) the distance between two points or two astral bodies or e) the temporal distance between two events. In modern Greek the word διάστημα is used to mean 'space' as in 'space research' etc" in Διαστημα, art.cit. p.245.
22. T.P. Verghese, ibid., p.245-6.
23. I.e. the view that the κοσμὸς is from the οὐσία of God, see Verghese, Ibid., p248.
24. Ibid., "For Plotinus, the origin of time is in the outward movement of the soul from the One. The soul separated from the vous the experience of time itself will cease, and eternity as changeless rest

will be experienced."

25. A.H. Armstrong, "The Nature of Man,"4.
26. Ibid., "In St. Gregory's way of thinking the distinction between creature and Creator always remains absolutely clear, for the One is Infinite Plenitude and the other a finite being which can never, however perfectly united to God, contain the whole of His infinity at once, and so is always in a sense in movement".
27. See B. Otis, "Cappadocian Thought as a Coherent System", DOP 12 (1958) 95-124; Idem. "The Cappadocian Concept of Time", SP 14(1976), 327-57.
28. A.A. Mosshammer, "The Created and the Uncreated in Gregory of Nyssa Contra Eu. 1, 105-113",in El "Contra Eunomium I" en el produccion literaria de Gregorio de Nisa, ed. L.F. Mateo-Seco and J.L. Bastero, (Pamplona 1988), p.353-354.
29. Ibid., p.354.
30. CE I, 133, Con Mac. GNO III, 104, Or.Cat. PG45.100, De Infant. PG46.172 etc.
31. Gregory is not always consistent in his terminology for such distinction, in In Cant. J173-74 for example the Uncreated and the Created seemed to be placed in the category of the intelligible and the sensible. Nevertheless, Gregory finds not difficulties about dividing reality in this way. See H. Cherniss, *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa* for this confusion in terminology.
32. We owe heavily on Mosshammer's analysis, and are convinced that his is the most persuasive argument so far. The following is based on his analysis.
33. De. Virg.;De Perf.;De Mort.; Beat.,In Psal.
34. De Virg.8 PG44.280, 296; De Perf. 8 PG46.195-96; In Psal GNO 5.40, 35; Beat PG 44.1200, 1209.
35. Mosshammer,art.cit. pp.361-362 has this to say, "[Gregory] emphasizes that the enslavement of the divine image itself results from an act of freedom...The soul freely permitted itself to become connatural with the sensible, instead of with the divine, so that the adversary found him easy to enslave...The enslavement of the intellectual soul does not result from its contact with the sensible; on the contrary, the synthesis of body and soul is both result and compensation for some fragility inherent in the intellectual nature

itself."

36. DHO PG44.209; cf. DAR PG46.41.
37. Mosshammer, art.cit., 363.
38. Ibid., 367.
39. DHO PG44.184.
40. Mosshammer, art.cit., 368.
41. V. Lossky points out that the concept of *Imago Dei* was not quite accepted by Protestant theologians, see "The Theology of the Image", in *In the Image and Likeness of God*, (Eng. trans., London: Mowbrays, 1974), pp. 126-27. A. Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (Eng. trans., London, 1953) quotes E. Lehmann, "It is no accident at this doctrine of the image of God was first developed at a time when the Greek Language was working its way into the religious literature of the Jews." p.230. But the complex intertwining of the concept of the image using Biblical and Hellenic thoughts cannot be dismissed outright as lacking Revelation, as Lossky has pointed out in idem. pp.127-132. The theme of the image of God in man is very important in Gregory's thought, and it has been extensively studied. See, Daniélou, *Platonisme*, pp.48-60; J.T. Muckle, "The Image of God," R. Leys, *L'image de Dieu chez saint Grégoire de Nysse*, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer 1951); H. Merki, *Ὁμοίωσις Θεῷ. Von der platonischen Angleichung an Gott zur Gottähnlichkeit bei Gregor von Nyssa*, (Fribourg: Paulusdruck 1952).
42. Hom 1.6.
43. Hom 1.7, in this respect he follows the tradition of Irenaeus (adv. H. V.6.1) who thinks that the image of God in man increases in knowledge and likeness to God which is linked to the gift of the Holy Spirit; and ultimately Origen (de Prin III.6.1; Con Cel IV. 30). See Meredith, "The Concept of Mind in Gregory of Nyssa and the Neoplatonists", SP 22(1989), 38-39.
44. See Hom 1.7, 1.17 on moral excellence Con. Eu. III.2 on intellectual enlightenment De Sp. San. IX.23 on divinization; all these represents the three elements to the final likeness. V.E.F. Harrison comments on Basil's thought thus, "For him (Basil) the *imago dei* defines humanity as such. It follows that everything extraneous to this image is secondary to the human condition and anything that obstructs or defaces it is a distortion of human nature that needs to be overcome. Human activity is accordingly understood primarily as moral activity, the exercise of virtues, which liken us to God, and vices, which do the opposite." in, "Male and Female in Cappadocian Theology," JTS, NS

41(1990), 449-50.

45. According to Leys, it seems to us that [Gregory] does distinguish between εἰκὼν and ὁμοίωσις, not, certainly, as between two different things, but as between two aspects of the same reality.
 (1) εἰκὼν - static aspect, original or terminal of the resemblance with God.
 (2) ὁμοίωσις is dynamic aspect - a becoming
 ὁμοίωσις is the conquest, or progressive realisation of the εἰκὼν
 But this is to make still too much of the distinction.
46. J.T. Muckle, "the Image of God", art.cit,56.
47. Ladner concedes that the distinction of image and likeness is probably of Gnostic origin, see Ladner, "Anthropology", art.cit.,63, n11.
48. E.g. Ad. Haer, 5.6.1.
49. For this idea see later in his mystical anthropology especially in Homily three, J63.
50. Ladner, art.cit.,64, for a summary of the opinions of other Fathers on the image and likeness in man. See G.I. Mantzaridis, *Deification of Man*, (NY: SVSP, 1984), pp.16-18.
51. The standard work is no doubt that of D.L. Balas, Μετοῦσια Θεοῦ. *Man's Participation in God's Perfection According to Saint Gregory of Nyssa*, (Rome: Herder 1966).
52. Or.Cat.5 PG45.21D; Srawley's translation, pp23-24.
53. This cannot be stressed enough. Balthasar, op.cit; Chapter V, maintains that the mode of existence of the attributes is different in God from what it is in us. V.E.F. Harrison puts it this way, "God is his attributes - goodness, life, etc. - eternally and infinitely. We, on the other hand, receive the same attributes from outside by participation, so that we possess them to a greater or lesser degree, according to our free choice, and we can either lose them or acquire a greater share in them." See her, *Grace and Human Freedom According to St. Gregory of Nyssa*, (NY:Edwin Mellen Press 1992), p91.
54. This is the subject of R.S. Brightman, "Apophatic Theology and Divine Infinity in St. Gregory of Nyssa", GOTR 18(173), 97-114.
55. See Part III, *passim*.
56. DHO 5, PG44.137A.

57. DHO 5 PG44.136D.
58. Or.Cat.5 PG45.21D.
59. DHO5 PG44.136B; NPNF,391.
60. V.E.F. Harrison, *Grace*, p142 points to a few passages in the Gregorian corpus, e.g. De Mort (GNO9.54) that Gregory makes a bold statement of saying that this "self-determination is equal to God." She is right in pointing out the equality is in so far as freedom from external coercion and it involves self-initiating activity. For its social and political implications see T.J.Dennis, "The Relationship Between Gregory of Nyssa's Attack on Slavery in his Fourth Homily on Ecclesiastes and His Treatise *De Hominis Opificio*," SP 17(1982) 1065-1072.
61. Or.Cat.21 PG45, 57C. This autocracy of choice must be maintained in order for it to be in keeping with a likeness to the divinity.
62. Muckle, art.cit; p67. Note that according to Mosshammer, this formulation is an earlier Gregorian thought. The fact of the incarnation becomes prominent in his later works, especially in *In Canticum Cantacorum*.
63. Beat5 PG44, 1256A. See also Moysis PG44, 301D, "Every person, male or female, is endowed with the power to choose good or evil."
64. DHO4 PG44.136BC; cf. De Virg 12 PG46.369BC.
65. De Virg 12 PG46.369C.
66. DHO 16 PG44.184B.
67. Or.Cat. 8 (Srawley 41), DAR PG46.13A.
68. DHO 16 PG44.186A.
69. Ibid.
70. Balthasar, *Présence*, p.1-2.
71. DHO 17 PG44.188C-D; Or.Cat. 6, 8, 20.
72. Cf. F.M. Young, "Adam and Anthropos: A Study in the Interaction of Science and the Bible in two Anthropological Treatise of the Fourth Century", VC 37(1983), 112-113.
73. DHO 16; 22 PG44.184B-D; 204C-205A. Cf. J.P. Burns, "The Economy of Salvation: Two Patristic Traditions," TS 37(1976), 601-602.

74. Cf. D.L. Blank, "The Etymology of Salvation in Gregory of Nyssa's *De Virginitate*," JTS NS 37(1986), 77-90; E.V. McClear, "The Fall of Man and Original Sin in the Theology of Gregory of Nyssa," Ts 9(1948), 175-212.
75. Quoting NPNF, 357-359.
76. For a different perspective see M.D. Hart, "Reconciliation of Body and Soul: Gregory of Nyssa's Deeper Theology of Marriage," TS 50(1989), 450-478; idem., "Gregory of Nyssa's Ironic Praise of the Celibate Life," HJ 33(1992), 1-19. See also T.H.C. Eijik, "Marriage and Virginité, Death and Immortality," in *Epektasis*, ed. J Fontaine and C. Kannengiesser, (Paris:Beauchesne 1972), 209-235.
77. J.J. O'Keefe, "Sin ἀπαθεια and Freedom of the Will in Gregory of Nyssa", SP 22(1989), 52; see also Brooks Otis, "Cappadocian Thought as a Coherent System", DOP 12(1958), 113.
78. DHO PG44.192Aff.
79. Ibid. Cf. Moysis VII, 1.46.8-12; See also, E. Ferguson, "God's Infinity and Man's Mutability. Perpetual Progress According to Gregory of Nyssa," GOTR 18(1973), 64, for Platonic influence on sin as ignorance.
80. Ibid. p.53-54. O'Keefe goes on to argue that Gregory's muddled idea of sin and choice leads to the conclusion that sin is a choice but never intentional, using theological controversy of the Church in the West as his base for this accusation, which to me is both anachronistic and improper.
81. E.g. Burns, art.cit. and C.A. Volz, *Faith and Practice in the Early Church: Foundations for Contemporary Theology*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg 1983), pp.47-56.
82. For the doctrine of evil, see E.J. Philippi, "The Doctrine of Evil in St. Gregory of Nyssa," SP 9(1966), 251-256; in which the Satanic responsibility is emphasised. A much more satisfying account of Gregory's doctrine of evil is A.A. Mosshammer, "Non-Being and Evil in Gregory of Nyssa," VC 44(1990), 136-167; which we will follow here.
83. Moysis, Bk 2.45.
84. Mosshammer, art.cit., 137 and 140.
85. Ibid., 140.
86. Moysis, Bk 2, n.29.

87. G.E. Gould, "Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa on the Beautitudes," SP 22(1989),15.
88. Moysis II.244. See our analysis of the Canticle text.
89. D.F. Duclow,"Gregory of Nyssa and Nicholas of Cusa: Infinity, Anthropology and the *via negativa*," Downside Review 92(1974), 107.
90. Cf. J.P. Carvanos, "The Relation of Body and Soul in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa," in *Gregor und die Philosophie*, p.62., idem., "Gregory of Nyssa on the Nature of the Soul," GOTR 1(1955), 133-141; C.P. Roth, "Platonic and Pauline Elements in the Ascent of the Soul in Gregory of Nyssa's Dialogue on the Soul and Resurrection," VC 46(1992), 20-30; For the body-soul relationship as Christian doctrinal utterances see, A.W. Argyle, "The Christian Doctrine of the Origin of the Soul," SJT 18(1965), 273-293; C. Partee, "The Soul in Plato, Platonism, and Calvin," SJT 22(1969), 278-295; J.F. Keenan,"Christian Perspectives on the Human Body," TS 55(1994), 330-346.
91. E.g. Parmenides, 1306; see exposition in this strain in E. Zeller, *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy*, trans. L.R, Palmer, (London: Routledge, 1958), in p.128 he says, "as a whole, Plato's philosophy is an idealistic system resting in a sharply defined dualism between mind and matter, God and the world, body and soul."
92. For Gregory's thought in his philosophical environment,see A.A. Armstrong, "Man in Cosmos: A Study of Some Differences Between Pagan Neoplatonism and Christianity," in *Romanitas et Christianitas*, ed. W. den Boer, P.G. van der Nat; C.M.J. Sucking; J.C.M. van Winden, (Amsterdam: North Holland Pub. 1973), 5-13.
93. DAR, 29B; cf. Alcibiades 129E/130A; Ennead VI.7.4.10; see also A. Meredith, "The Concept of Mind in Gregory of Nyssa and the Neoplatonists",SP 22(1989),42.
94. DHO PG44.233D. This is also Gregory's attempt to counter Origen's acceptance of the soul's actual pre-existence, which he rejects as leading to the absurdities of re-incarnation and the soul's possible destruction.
95. Cf. D.E. Scuiry, "The Anthropology of St. Gregory of Nyssa," Diakonia 18(1983), 31-42.
96. Cf. DHO PG44.241D.
97. Debates on Gregory's doctrine of the resurrection of the body are complex, see especially T.J. Dennis, "Gregory on the Resurrection of

- the Body," in *The Easter Sermons of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. A. Spira and C. Klock, (Mass.: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation 1981), 55-80; idem., "St. Gregory of Nyssa's Defence of the Doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body," *EkkPh* 60(1978), 580-624: 61(1979), 480-562; *Ἐκκλησία καὶ Θεολογία*(London) 1(1980), 431-458.
98. DAR PG46.28A; 44C.
 99. DAR PG46.44C-48C; 78a-80a; 84D-85B.
 100. DHO 25 PG44.198B-D.
 101. Ibid.
 102. Contra Philo Migr. abr. ii, quod. deus immut. 32; Plotinus Enn. i.8.3.
 103. DAR PG46.69B.
 104. Meredith, art.cit.,35.
 105. Cf. DHO PG44.161A-B; 149B-153A.
 106. DHO PG44.161C.
 107. De Virg 5.
 108. DAR PG46.61A; cf. PG46.89Bff. De Virg 18, PG 46.392C-D. In Cant 11, J333-334, Beat 1, PG44.1200Cff.
 109. DAR PG46.61B.
 110. DHO 18 PG44.192D-193D; cf. In Cant 8, J25-J251.
 111. R. Williams, "Macrina's Deathbed," art.cit., 229. On the various Greek philosophical influence in this concept see G.C. Stead, "The Concept of Mind and the Concept of God in the Christian Fathers", in *the Philosophical Frontiers of Christian Theology. Essays Presented to Donald Mackinnon*, ed. B. Gebblethwaite and S. Sutherland (Cambridge: CUP 1982), 39-54. Stead thinks that by employing this Platonic/Aristotelian category for the divisions of the soul has the effect of repeating "Aristotle's mistake of regarding man simply as an animal with reason added on as an extra capacity", p.48. R. Williams art. cit., thinks that the issue is more complex than that and in his article attempts to show a more rounded understanding of Gregory's anthropology by examining more closely his the *De anima et resurrectione* in conjunction with the *De Hominis Opificio*. The following is to summarize the fruit of his findings and draws out this implication for Gregory's mystical anthropology.

112. Ibid., p.236.
113. DAR PG46.60C-61B.
114. R. Williams art. cit., 237.
115. Ibid.
116. Ibid., 238. This is an important point in the discussion of desire in the soul, not for self-glorification but for seeking the good without end in Gregory's mystical anthropology.

PART II

SEQUENCE AND THEMES IN MYSTICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

PART TWO

SEQUENCE AND THEMES IN MYSTICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

In these chapters, we shall present all key passages of Gregory's homilies, following the order in which they are written, focussing our attention on all nuances and aspects which give light to the formulation of his mystical anthropology, and in the different relationships which that doctrine involves.

It will be evident that the following aspects become dominating themes in Gregory's mystical anthropology:

A. The Concept of Sequence (Akolouthia)

This, we submit, is the singular dominating methodology not only for Gregory's theological system, but also for his allegorical interpretation. Gregory is careful in picking his way through the Canticle text, thereby presenting his thought and its development within the framework of the Canticle. To anticipate a little, Gregory presents his mystical anthropology in the form of the soul in flight, ascending to his destined glory. First, the soul is presented in that movement in virtue in the framework of the Incarnation (Chapter Two, Homilies one to six). Its ascent is then seen as related intimately with the Church (Chapter Three, Homilies seven to ten). And finally the soul and the Church reach out to embrace all as they unite in love with the desire of their heart, the Bridegroom (Chapter Four,

Homilies eleven to fifteen).

B. The Central Role of the Incarnation

In each of the tripartite movement, the role of the Incarnation is of paramount importance. It serves to define the mechanics of the ascent of the soul/Church, making that ascent possible and indeed a reality to be grasped and imitate. It also sharply defines the gulf between the Created and the Uncreated, so that fusion is impossible, but this in turn becomes the basis for the doctrine of *Epektasis*.

C. The Dependence Upon Philosophical Anthropology

Gregory's mystical anthropology assumes the doctrines as formulated in our Chapter One: The distinction between the Uncreated and the Created; the fact that man is created in the image of God, comprising free will; the reality of man as both sensible and intelligible; and the restoration of man in Christ. All these, ironically serve him well in approaching Gregory's apophaticism, so that A. Meredith is right to warn us, "But it is perhaps worth remembering in our enthusiasm for [Gregory's] apophaticism that he was also a theologian who believed the validity of our perceptions about the nature of God, derived either from creation or revelation"¹.

CHAPTER TWO

HOMILIES ONE TO SIX

2.1 HOMILY ONE: INTRODUCING THE BOOK AND THE KEY THEMES OF THE SONG OF SONGS

Gregory of Nyssa, in introducing his exposition of the Song of Songs, no doubt inherits a rich tradition that goes back to Philo of Alexandria and Origen². In his prologue, he acknowledges the existence of Origen's commentary on the Song, but insists that he has the right, as stewardship of God's mystery in the Scriptures, to expound once again the text of the Song³. The fact that he would like his audience to see himself as the inheritor of the rich tradition is abundantly clear from his first Homily. But the fiercely independent character of his exposition from the very first verse of the Canticle text onwards is also another fact to be remembered lest we should see Gregory as just an accumulator of ancient wisdom without ideas of his own.

2.1.1 Who and How Should the Canticle be Read

We can trace almost all of the first part of the first homily, that of the prologue to the text proper, to Origen or even Philo⁴. The Song of Songs, according to Gregory, is for those "who have put on the Lord Jesus Christ with his holy robe and have been transformed with him into a state which is free of passion and more divine" [J14.18- J15.2]. The implication is that the Song of Songs is only for the initiated, those who have at least

set their mind on spiritual things and who have undergone the process of initiation into the Church as implied by the putting on the new garment, a symbol of the baptized⁵.

The warning against reading the Canticle in a carnal way, feeding carnal imaginations, is obvious because of the explicitness of the text on erotic love. This is a universal warning for all allegorical expositors of the Canticle⁶. Gregory is even more adamant than most in condemning such usage of the Song: "Anyone who entertains such shameful illusions should be cast out from the company of those who share the nuptial joys to the place of weeping" [J15.8-10]. And later in the same homily, he repeats his warning and abhorrence of those who use the Song this way, "Let no one who is passionate, fleshly and still smelling of the foul odour of the old man drag down the significance of the divine thoughts and words to beastly, irrational thoughts" [J25.3-6]. Gregory, and all expositors of the Canticle, sees the wonderful paradox in using the most explicit of erotic love to bring out the most implicit of divine, incorporeal union of God and the soul of man. "What could be more paradoxical than to make nature purify itself of its own passions and teach ἀπαθεια in words normally suggesting πάθος" [J29.3-6]⁷.

The right attitude then in approaching the Song of Songs is not by carnal passion, neither is it out of fear of punishment or hell, but by the path of love. Here Gregory certainly follow Philo's analysis of man seeking salvation⁸. The three categories of people coming to salvation include salvation by fear, i.e. contemplating the threat of punishment in hell and

so avoid evil [J16.1]. Secondly, there are those who come because of "the hope of reward held out for a life piously lived, conduct themselves virtuously" [J16.2-4]. But the person seeking perfection comes not out of fear or even rewards, because he prefers the giver rather than the gift. This last is the preferred category who will find the message of the Canticle most conducive [J16.5-7]. In his last homily on the Song of Songs, Gregory repeats the categories, thus forming a suitable inclusio to the whole enterprise of the exposition of the Canticle, and there, the person who loves "with his whole heart and soul and strength" is termed the perfect one, the bride in complete union with the Bridegroom⁹.

2.1.2 Solomon and the Song of Songs

Concerning the title of the Canticle, "The Song of Songs which is Solomon's" (Canticle 1:1), all allegorical authors have some explanations, but all would agree that Solomon is a type of Christ¹⁰. Solomon's triple identity as the son of David, man of wisdom and son of peace is enough to make the typological identity with Christ conducive. Thus, "Christ used Solomon as an instrument and speaks to us through his voice first in Proverbs and then in Ecclesiastes. After these two books he speaks in the philosophy set forth in the Song of Songs and show us the ascent to perfection in an orderly fashion" [J17 -12].

Gregory borrows from Origen the idea that the three canonical books which bear Solomon's authorship as symbolic of man's ascent to perfection,

first through proper moral instruction, then through realization of the vanity of the material world to finally giving beyond things seen to pursue things unseen [J18-J22]¹¹. Rather more precisely though is Gregory's exposition. He concentrates on the advancement, as it were, from spiritual infant to full maturity of the soul seeking perfection¹². "Proverbs begins the description of wisdom to the child in several different ways and expounds the ineffable beauty so as not to inspire any fear or constraint; rather, it draws the child by yearning and desire to participate in the good" [J19.4-8]. Both Gregory and Origen have less to say on Ecclesiastes as the second stage in the spiritual ascent¹³, perhaps because the message of Ecclesiastes is clear:

"Then Solomon adds the philosophy contained in Ecclesiastes for the person who has been sufficiently introduced by proverbial training to desire virtue. After having reproached in that book men's attitudes towards external appearances, and after having said that everything unstable is vain and passing ("everything which passes is vanity"). Solomon elevates above everything grasped by sense the loving movement of our soul towards invisible beauty. Having thus cleansed the heart with respect to external matters, Solomon then initiates the soul into the divine sanctuary by means of the Song of Songs." [J22.10-17]

Gregory assumes Origen's explanation of the term "the Song of Songs", noting other worthy songs prior to the Canticle¹⁴, and assures his audience that "the noble text promises to teach us the mystery of mysteries" [J26.11-16] because "It teaches us of the need for the soul to reach out to the divine nature's invisible beauty and to love it as much as the body is inclined to love what is akin to itself" [J27.9-11].



2.1.3 Gender Shift in the Song of Songs

With the exposition of the theme of the Song of Songs, comes gender consideration. The son in Proverbs who receives instructions in the virtuous life grows into maturity and is named a bride. It is possible to see a disregard of gender here, but it would be reading too much into the text if one thinks that Gregory deliberately confuse the normal use of gender representations¹⁵. What comes up most clearly from the whole issue is hardly gender, but the relationship between the giver and the receiver. The son *receives* maternal instruction and paternal admonition [J18.8-12]. Like an infant, the soul is "coaxed" with childish trinkets, here meaning several different descriptions of the beauty of wisdom, in order to whet its appetite for the good, thus fanning its desire for a participation in beauty [J19.1-10]. Wisdom, as is conventional in Scriptural term, is represented as feminine. It is like a youth receiving his beautiful lover. According to Gregory, Solomon by his writings in Proverbs then leads the youth to gaze at the divine bridal chamber and exhorts him not to let her go, as wisdom, the bride, "may give to your head a crown of graces" [Prov. 4:9, J21.6-10]. The youth awaits the time when he would be bridegroom as he is inflamed by desire for his wisdom-bride. With the text of the Song of Songs, Gregory introduce a gender reversal, he says of the Canticle, "What is described there is a marriage; but what is understood is the union of the human soul with God" [J22.18-19]. The nuptial drama here requires the soul to be on the receiving end, accepting salvation and indwelling of Christ. From all the

imageries above, it is clear that no matter what the gender of the soul portrayed, it is always on the receiving end. The text of Proverbs requires the soul to be masculine, whereas the text of the Canticle requires it to be feminine. Even when the same nuptial image is used as long as God remains in the role of giver, "wisdom [can be] changed into the role of a bridegroom so that a person might be espoused to God by becoming a pure virgin instead of a bridegroom" [J23.3-6].

2.1.4 The Characters of the Nuptial Drama

In this first Homily, Gregory attempts to define the characters in the nuptial drama. The bride is the soul in ascent to perfection while representing the Universal Church in a minor way, then only as a community of individual members in their journey¹⁶. There are two companies around the bride. One is the bringers of divine wedding gifts to the bride. Gregory defines this company as "the patriarchs, prophets and givers of the Law" [J24.2-4] and the examples of the gifts as "forgiveness of trespasses, forgetfulness of evil deeds, the cleansing of sins, transformation of nature, the exchange of corruptibility for incorruptibility, enjoyment of paradise, the dignity of God's Kingdom, and joy without end" [J24.5-9]. These, however, are the gifts from the Giver whom the bride "hastens to enjoy" [J24.12]. The other company are attendants and associates of the bride who are later defined as fellow seekers of perfection but remain in most part admirers of the bride's achievement. The Bridegroom is

God/Christ and the chorus of well-wishers and friends, according to Gregory, "represent either the ministering spirits by whom men are saved or the holy prophets" [J24.13-14].

2.1.5 A Thought on the Resurrection

There is a curious passage about the doctrine of resurrection which Gregory states here but never fully follows through in subsequent homilies, but nevertheless is quite important in its implication on his concept of the human body in the whole scheme of spiritual ascent. We will just quote the full passage here and leave till later for integrative comment:

"The Song's text readily employs words whose obvious meaning indicates the enjoyment of carnal passion. Yet it does not fall into any improper meaning but leads us to the philosophy of divine things by means of chaste concepts. It shows that we are no longer to be men with a nature of flesh and blood; rather, it points to the life we hope for at the resurrection of the saints, an angelic life free from all passion. After the resurrection, the body which has been transformed into incorruptibility, will again be joined to the soul. The passions now disturbing us because of the flesh will not be restored with those bodies; rather, we shall become tranquil. No longer will the flesh's prudence dispute with the soul. No longer will there be civil war with the passions set against the mind's law, where the soul is overcome and taken captive by sin. Nature will then be cleansed from all such things, and one spirit will be in both. (I mean both in the flesh and in the spirit), and every corporeal disposition will be banished from human nature. Thus the text of the Song exhorts us, even if we now live in the flesh, not to turn to it in our thoughts; rather we should only regard the soul and attribute all manifestations of affection in the text to the surpassing goodness of God as pure, undefiled offerings. For God alone is truly sweet, desirable and worthy of love. The present enjoyment of God is the starting point for a greater share of his goodness, and it increases our desire for him." [J30.1 - J31.8]

2.1.6 Major Themes in the Song of Songs

The Cantic text 1:2-4 serves Gregory well in presenting most of his key themes in the subsequent homilies on mystical anthropology. We will present these themes here, and with analysis of the rest of his book, we will find the themes gradually coming together in an integrative whole:

i. The theme of epektasis

Desire is the key word here, it can turn the soul either to pursue *πάθος* or *ἀπαθεία*. The soul in pursuit of perfection finds that its desire for the good actually increases with each encounter with God and each time, it is spurred on to pursue even greater perfection. Moses is a case in point. He is a symbol and example for the soul in flight. Commenting on Cantic 1:2, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." Gregory says,

"Moses conversed with God face to face, as scripture testifies and he thereby acquired a still greater desire for these kisses after the theophanies. He sought God as if he had never seen him. So it is with all others in whom the desire for God is deeply embedded: they never cease to desire, but every enjoyment of God they turn into the kindling of a still more intense desire. Even now the soul united to God never has its fill of enjoyment. The more it enjoys his beauty, the more its desire for him increases." [J31.8- J32.2]¹⁷

ii. The Imagery of Fragrance and Fountain

"The scent of your perfumes is beyond all ointments." (Cantic 1:3) The

soul is the receptacle for fragrance of Christ¹⁸ and as the soul draws from the fountain of life who is Christ, it gradually acquires the Christ-like odour and exudes virtues like wisdom, justice temperance, fortitude and so forth. [J35.16-19] And when the soul has quenched its thirst by bring "its mouth to the mouth that springs up with life" [J32.18-19], it so wells up with life that he "wishes all to be saved and desires every person to share this kiss, for this kiss purges away all filth" [J33.4-6].

iii. The Ineffability of Divine Nature

"Your name is ointment poured forth" (Cantic 1:3). Gregory insists on the divine ineffability but retains the concept that it is not totally ungraspable. It is given to the creation of God traces of his true divine nature, and this is enough for humanity to go by, forming concepts and forms of words and names "even if they seem to contain something great and befitting God's glory, are unable to grasp his reality" [J36.18-19]. However, what is visible in the universe shows forth God's wisdom, power, goodness, holiness, blessedness, eternity, judgement and salvation. [J37.14-17]

iv. Ecclesiastical Concern

"Let us rejoice and be glad in you" (Canticle 1:4). The young maidens in question rejoice with the bride for achieving the status of union with the bridegroom. These maidens are fellow pursuers in the ecclesiastical setting, "are not yet perfect in virtue and who are still young" [J39.17]. And because of the example of the perfect soul they are encouraged in their own spiritual quest and at the same time spur the perfecting souls even further on to greater glory. "Because you love the word's breast more than wine, we shall imitate you and love your breasts more than human wine, for through them you feed those who are infants in Christ." [J41.1-3] They are assisted by the leaders in the believing community in feeding them the Word fill them with the good and urge them on their journey.

2.2 HOMILY TWO: HUMAN NATURE, SIN, FALL AND REDEMPTION

As is appropriate, Homily two, which begins the exposition of the fate of humanity, starts with the Bride's description about herself. She appears here as a teacher explaining to the daughter of Jerusalem the metamorphosis that Christ effected in her through the Incarnation and through Baptism. She describes in great detail (here Gregory uses more than half of the homily), her "pre- history" as a background for understanding how great and merciful the Bridegroom's work is. Finally, she exhorts them to imitate her in pursuing virtue and avoiding ignorance.

2.2.1 Introducing the Theme of Virtuous Life

Gregory first uses two imageries in association as an introduction to his forthcoming detailed exposition of the Song of Songs: the tent of testimony and the Holy of Holies which is situated in the center of the tent. This is appropriate as they connects the description of the Song of Songs in terms of the Holy of Holies in Homily One [J26.11-20] and the subsequent description of the Bride in terms of the tents of Kedar and the curtains of Solomon. The allegorical association is thus put to good use. The allegorical interpretation of the tent of witness from the outer curtains to the Holy of Holies is itself a summary of the soul's journey to perfection:

"Once again the Song of songs is presented to us as a guide for every type of philosophy and knowledge of God. The Song of Songs is the true tent of witness whose veils, skins and coverings of the outer court are terms and expressions of love." [J44.9-14]

But as Gregory himself noted, "there was nothing precious to be seen on the tent's exterior." It is meant as a covering of the glorious content inside. It would be puzzling just to take this outer court at face value: how can it be "an expression of love?" [J44.13-14]

It is not until we come to Homily seven that we begin to understand his idea of exterior uncomeliness with the interior glory. His likening of the bride's cheek with the skin of a pomegranate (Cant.4:3)¹⁹ is equivalent to the covering of the tent which protects the precious elements inside. Allegorically, it means that virtue can only be protected by an ascetic self-control. Thus a virtuous life will always have its ascetic factor²⁰. This is

not to be confused with the description of the bride's skin as black in relation to, for example her inward beauty.

2.2.2 Human Nature, Sin and Fall

The word, 'black', becomes the occasion for expounding the doctrine of sin and fall²¹. The text says, "I am black and beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem, as the tent of cedar, as the curtain (skin) of Solomon. Do not look at me because I have become blackened, because the sun has looked unfavourably at me" (Canticle 1:5,6). The passage is tinged with gloom and degradation, yet there is a "pastness" to it as she also describes herself as beautiful, what Gregory stated elsewhere as "the grandeur and the misery of man"²². Gregory very much admits to this contradiction of the human condition when he accurately sees the description of the Bride as black and beautiful at the same time:

"The bride says, although the beauty given to me by being loved by righteousness now shines forth, I still realize that in the beginning I was not radiant but black. My former life has created this dark, shadowy appearance. Although I am black, I am now this beautiful form, for the image of darkness has been transformed into beauty." [J47.7-12]

The assessment of the present human condition is described as "disfigurement" (μεταποιήσις) [J53.11]. Yet Gregory is emphatic in the confirmation of the grandeur of the image of God in man, "In the beginning it was not so"²³. Thus in the interpretation of Canticle 1:6 ("The son of my mother have fought in me; they have placed me as a guard in the vineyard.

I have not guarded my own vineyard"), Gregory restates his previous doctrine of man before and after the Fall:²⁴

"Man did not lack at the beginning anything of the divine bounty; his task was only to protect the good things received from God, not to acquire them. However, the plotting of the dangerous enemies has made man naked, for he did not guard the portion given him in his nature by God." [J54, 5-9]

The portion given man in his nature is the "vineyard" which symbolises variously paradise [J57]; immortality, a state free of passion, likeness to God, and estrangement from evil [J60], the fruit of this vineyard being purity.²⁵ Gregory then elaborates on the "content" of the vineyard in order to substantiate the greatness of the loss in human nature at the Fall: the fruit, which is purity, "sweetens the senses in chastity"; others includes the union and kinship with eternal life; heavenly virtues blossoming together with the Spirit, obviously alluding to the Pauline passage in Galatians (Gal. 5:20ff).

All this is lost, because "I did not keep my own vineyard". There seems to be two reasons given in conformity with the Canticle text, one personal, "having failed through ignorance to steadfastly keep my guard" [J60.11]; and the other by "the plotting of dangerous enemies" [J54.9]. But first Gregory is emphatic in stressing that the cause of darkness should never be ascribed to the Creator. Be it personal succumbing to temptation or by the plotting of the enemies, its origin is attributed to the free will of each individual [J50.11]. It was the good intention of God to bestow on man the grace of free will, the free choice that comes with it is a provision for man to empower him in order to find what he wants. But in the nature

of things, free will is misused.²⁶ Yet here, one is never sure what actually causes the Fall. "Temptation" is given as the reason that "made [the tender shoot lacking roots = the tender soul] black by the burning heat". This statement is made more ambiguous in the context of the parable of the Sower from which comes the inference of temptation as the scorching sun. Are we to suppose that temptation would bypass the seed sowed on good soil, thus making the universal phenomenon of the Fall sound absurd? But Gregory elaborates the point by quoting Psalm 120:6, where it says of him whose help is from God, that "he will not be burned by the sun during the day" [J52.7], and the procession in Isaiah 66:12 which is kept from burning heat by parasols. These Gregory takes to mean self-control and purity which will ward off the burning heat of temptation. Only now can we ascertain that what Gregory means is *the state of fallenness* rather than the Original Fall.

Another reason given for the fall from grace is "the plotting of the enemies", the Enemy in question turns out to be the original tempter, "the father of all lies". By a feat of exegetical gymnastic, "he" becomes the mother of many sons in conformity with the Canticle text, the sons being interpreted to mean the many ways of evil [J56.14]. The father of lies who "freely rejects participation in the good introduces evil" and does battle with good against everyone who chooses good. Gregory then describes the state of fallenness as already happening in human nature as sin is introduced from the beginning to the rest of mankind. [J56.1] So in fact the supposedly two reasons collapse into one. The temptation comes in many forms of evil,

"making the soul herself a battleground of the war within" [J57.1].

Such was the predicament of mankind that because of their wilful choice to sin so much so that "persons keep guard over such evils, thinking it a loss to be deprived of iniquity" [J59.2,3]. The effect of this is that others are affected by it. The bride laments that she was forced to choose this way of life by her fellow humans and thus "did not keep my own vineyard". She was driven out of purity and put on "a tunic of dark appearance", a favourite description of man's depravity, which here in the Song of Songs is conveniently represented by the dark skin of the Bride. This neglect of her own vineyard was brought to her attention almost like the prodigal son in the Gospel.

2.2.3 The Theme of Grace

The theme of grace is very prominent here²⁷. The texture of the Bride's skin is likened to a duality of the tents of Kedar and the tents of Solomon. Gregory's interpretation follows consistently his theme of progress of the soul and using the *akolouthia* method, i.e. there is a movement of thought and deed from the description of the tents of Kedar to the tents of Solomon. The tents of Kedar is the condition of the Bride before the transforming grace of Christ is received in the soul, "the ruler of the powers of darkness dwelt in you (the word "~~k~~edar" signifies darkness), you will become "the curtains of Solomon", that is, you will become the king's temple with King Solomon dwelling in you." [J47.13 - J48.1] In the clearest

statement of his doctrine of grace, he contrasts light and darkness:

"Although we were darkened through sin, God made us bright and loving through his resplendent grace. When everything is enshrouded by the prevailing gloom of night, even if things happen to be light by nature, with the coming of light, the comparison to darkness does not apply to things previously obscured by gloom. The soul is thus led over from error to the truth, and the dark form of its life is changed to resplendent grace." [J48.6-24]

This grace that enables the sinner to rid himself of darkness comes through Christ by virtue of his Incarnation, "to enlighten those who were dark" [J49.1-2] summoning "sinners to repentance whom he made to shine as luminaries by the bath of regeneration which washed away their dark form". [J49.3-4] With this comment, Gregory states his orthodox view of grace, the meaning of Incarnation and redemption. Baptism ("the bath of regeneration") marks the sinner off as being enlightened.

The work of Christ does not stop at repentance and baptism, "because if he receives a blackened soul, he restores its beauty by fellowship with himself" [J49.16-18] the "tents of Cedar" (darkness) is transformed by the indwelling king of peace into the "tents of Solomon" (dwelling of light).

2.2.4 Repentance and Redemption

The Bride's repentance is recorded as a long prayer to the Good Shepherd who "even though I am black, you laid down your life for your sheep", exchanging his life for the Bride's salvation. But this salvation does not come as an automatic "insertion" into the life of the sinner. Gregory's

hymn of prayer to the Good Shepherd brings out all the essential aspects of a repentant soul reaching out for redemption:

i. the realisation of her failure and the plead to be restored back into the fold of the Shepherd: "call me by name that I may hear your voice, I who am your sheep." [J61.11-12]

ii. Recognition of the distance, and therefore the impossibility without grace, between creator and sinful creation: "I call you like this since your name is above every other name. It is ineffable and not contained by any intelligent nature." [J61:14-16]

iii. Recognition of yet a way to salvation: "Even though I am black, you laid down your life for your sheep. No greater love than this can be comprehended, for you exchanged your life for my salvation." [J61.20-21]

iv. Hopeful recognition of the certainty of being received and nourished: "And running to you, the fountain, I will drink from the divine stream which you cause to spring up for those thirsting after you." [J62.3-4]

v. The affirmation of the efficacy of the Cross:
"Water pours out from your side and the spear has opened the vein. The person tasting it will become a spring welling up into eternal life." [J62.5--7]

2.2.5 Introducing the Theme of Darkness and Eternal Progress

There follows the first of the formulation of Gregory's idea of the eternal progress of the human person in ever more intensifying desire for the Bridegroom:

"But she is still not yet deemed worthy of the bridegroom"s

voice because God foresees something even better in store for her, namely that prelude of her enjoyment might flare up her desire into something stronger. Thus her desire may intensify her gladness." [J63.4-6]

Thus the Bride's salvation does not immediately result in the glorious knowledge of herself or a clearer vision of her Bridegroom as opposed to her previous state of ignorance. In fact the Bride's spiritual journey begins in mystical darkness. She is left, as it were, to grope in the dark as "she is still not yet deemed worthy of the bridegroom's voice". It will have to await another stage in her ascent. Yet the result does not lead to despair, instead it helps to trigger her to desire for something stronger: "Tell me, to whom my soul has loved, where do you pasture?"

2.2.6 The Importance of Knowing Oneself

The Bridegroom/shepherd does not offer immediate answer or response, instead his friends offer some advice "about the eternity of the future good" [J63.10-11]. In the words of the Canticle, "If you do not know yourself, beautiful among women, go in the footsteps of the flocks, and feed the kids by the shepherds' tents". (Canticle 1:8) Gregory follows Origen's interpretation closely here. "Know Yourself" (γῶθί σαυτὸν) of the well-known saying was said to be anticipated by the wise Solomon²⁸. Gregory, like Origen²⁹, professes some difficulty in interpretation. To know oneself is to know the distinction between what is himself and all that do not belong to him. [J63] How is this to be done? Gregory offers some ways:

- i. "He who esteems life in this world and judges its value as worth

protecting does not know how to discern what is his own from what is alien to himself." [J64.8-10]

ii. "The person who separates himself from what endures will be borne away by instability."

iii. "By the human nature's faculty of reason, he knows if "he follows in the steps of those who preceded him and takes the passing custom of this world as his guide" then he does not distinguish good from evil." [J66.9-12]

The person who is ignorant of himself leaves the flocks of sheep and feeds with the goats whom Christ have rejected at his left hand. [J65.5-6] In fact, ignorance of self has already erred from the truth. [J65.12] Therefore to protect one's own good, one must diligently watch over oneself with the sure consolation that he is esteemed more highly by the Creator than all his other creations, by creating man in his image. More importantly, the soul is exhorted to remember that, "although he hold all creation in his palm, you can wholly contain him. God dwells in you, penetrates you, and is not confined in you" [J68.11-14]. This great theme of divine indwelling will become one of the most persistent doctrines in Gregory's mystical anthropology and in the rest of his homilies.

2.3 HOMILY THREE: THE FIRST TASTE OF GLORY

Gregory's analysis of the human predicament has led him to conclude that human nature is tinged with sin from the beginning, this results in the blackening of the soul, caused by the consequence of self-neglect and the

temptation without. While here Gregory does not describe in so many words his idea of the first illumination of the soul as in *De Vita Moysis*³⁰, he sees the same process at work in the Bride's utterance, "Tell me, you whom my soul has loved, where do you cause your flocks to rest at noon..." The recognition of the soul's beloved has the effect of both the recognition of its saviour and the true path in which it will find its true destiny. The soul is thus being led from ignorance of its true identity towards illumination, "to rest at noon" being the coinage for this illumination: "For if you shepherd me, you will make me lie down at midday when I will rest peacefully in the shadowless light, for midday has no shadow when the sun shines directly overhead." [J62.6-7] But this illumination is but a beginning in the spiritual life of the soul, a mystical journey through deliberate divine elusive absence is forshadowed before the Bride is deemed worthy of the Bridegroom's voice "because God foresees something even better in store for her". Yet this journey is not in total darkness and ignorance, the Bridegroom's friends came to the rescue, advising the Bride to go in the footsteps of the flocks of the Good Shepherd; the friends, being the ministering spirits and the flocks, being those who are on the side of virtue as against goats which Christ himself has rejected³¹.

2.3.1 The First Encounter of Light as The Voice of the Bridegroom

Thus the mystical life begins for the new creation in Christ. Up to this point the Groom has not appeared. Now that the preparation has been

done do we hear of the voice of the Groom, "rises like the sun, and by the brilliance of its beams it renders invisible the light of the stars and the breaking dawn" [J70.22-71.3].

The introduction to the progressive mystical life uses the imagery of a burst of light in the soul as dawn breaks after the night has passed. But again Gregory is careful when he states that, "they are not the pure light, but a prelude to the light", a position he holds firmly that mankind is but a reflection of the pure light of God³². It goes without saying that the Groom is the true light that the Bride seeks. This first contact with the true light "signifies cleansing and purification by which souls are purified and prepared to receive God", the very same imagery that he again uses later in *De Vita Moysis*. And as with the experience of the Israelites during the theophany at Mt. Sinai³³, at first God's presence is known "in darkness, the whirlwind, the sound of the trumpet, or the terrible fire", after this, his presence becomes "both sweet and accessible".

2.3.2 In Praise of The Purified Soul

Before the Groom speaks, Gregory restates his refrain: "Once the governing part of the soul has been cleansed, the Word rises like the sun for her who desires him and exhorts her to greater perfection by receiving what is already present, for praise of deeds rightly instills a keener desire for the Good." [J72.14] The reference is to the fact that whatever is obtained or achieved by the Bride helps to spur her on to greater glory and

participation in God. It is interesting to note that what Gregory says here is in line with his doctrine of Progress in Perfection as is outlined in more explicit terms in *De Vita Moysis*: The perfection of human nature consists perhaps in its very growth in goodness³⁴. At this stage the Bride's growth in perfection is such that it is worthy of the Bridegroom's praise.

The speech in praise of the Bride by the Groom in fact indicates the precious status the bride has achieved in the sight of the Groom. It centres around the imagery of horses/cavalry, which is demanded by the Cantic text, "I have compared you, my beloved, to my cavalry facing the chariots of Pharaoh".(Cant. 1.9) The mention of cavalry and Pharaoh immediately calls to mind the Exodus event. But this incurs two very specific problems. Gregory admits that the imagery does not tally with the Biblical event: there was no cavalry on Israel's (therefore God's) side against Pharaoh's chariot. But he soon finds a way of explanation, even as "it is not possible to interpret these words according to the literal sense". The cavalry concerned is the allegory of divine power, the invisible power of God through miracles in the sea. Quoting several Biblical texts to support his theory (i.e. Hab 3:8; Psa 67:17; 2Kg 2:11), he assumes that the cavalry must be the angelic host that exercise divine power against the enemies of God's people: "The cavalry which drew the soul to God through the 'course of virtue' is compared to the one which destroyed the Egyptian power". [J75.8-9]

A greater problem is to compare the Bride to the cavalry, a legion of horses. There exists a hypothetical rhetorical argument: how can we

compare the redeemed with horses when the creatures are always seen in a bad light in the Biblical record? In a bid to justify this comparison, Gregory disregards the varied imageries in the speech of the Bridegroom and in effect collapses all imageries into one that serves this justification. Thus when the Groom says: "Why are your cheeks beautiful, like those of a beautiful turtledove?" (Cant. 1:10), Gregory takes this to mean that "in place of a bridle for the jaw of the divine horse, we have cheeks compared to a dove. They signify that a life of purity befits such a horse" [J79.6-7], turtledove being a symbol of purity.

Even more fantastic is his exegesis of the following line, "Your neck is as small necklaces". These necklaces are compared to the ones made to wear on young horses which made them more beautiful to behold. It turns out that Gregory wishes to capitalise the round shape of the necklace itself. The round shape reminds us of the young horse bending its neck into the form of a circle, thus paying "attention to its own footsteps so that it runs safely" [J80.4] and this is allegorically interpreted as a soul "which is attentive and hastens without falling on the divine course, leaping over and transcending every impediment of temptation in its way" [J80.7-8]. Then abandoning the imagery of the horses, he explains that the word 'chain' (ῥαπὶς) also refers to harbour, a welcome safe refuge for sailors. Thus when the bride is compared to necklaces, she is also allegorically described as a soul disposed to keep calm and not being tossed by passion and evil, it can also lead other storm-tossed souls to safe haven. This ability to keep calm in face of passion and evil cultivates temperance, pure life, eagerness for

virtue, piety and sound faith and above all the knowledge of God [J82].

2.3.3 Preparations for Divine Indwelling: A Mount Fit for the King

The theme of cavalry is again continued by the bridegroom's friends who will make for the bride figures of gold with studs of silver [Canticle 1:11]. Gregory sees this as the friends' determination to adorn the horse/Bride so that she is fitting to receive the king on her back, because the soul, purified as it is, "has not become subject to the Word; neither does it bear upon itself him who is borne upon horses for the purpose of bringing salvation" [J84.4-5]. There is always room for preparing itself to receive the king. In order for the horse to be the fitting mount of the king, symbolising the indwelling of the divine in human nature, a couch of the *likeness* of gold studded with silver must be made.

Here Gregory launches into his familiar theme of the transcendence of God and its relation to man being made in his image³⁵. There can never be an adequate expression for God the ineffable and the unutterable. The divine nature "does not show its form which no one has seen or can see, but through a mirror and a riddle it provides a reflection of the thing sought, that is, a reflection present in the soul by a certain likeness"³⁶. But by faith, the soul can receive certain images and likeness of truth, thus can "become submissive and be a dwelling place through faith for the one about to recline and dwell in" it. Like St. Paul, it no longer lived its own life, but showed Christ living in it, "Thus he was a house containing that nature

which cannot be contained" [J88.4], a pregnant phrase full of incarnational implications.

2.3.4 Preparations For Divine Indwelling: Imitating the Fragrance of Christ

Up to this point the Bride can only hear the praises of the Groom. The Groom is, as it were, so near and yet so far. The employment of sense perception, except for sight, first of hearing and then of smell, indicates how far Gregory is prepared to go in utilising mystical languages: " with the sense of smell she touches the one she seeks" [J88.10]. And indeed with Cantic 1:12, "My nard gave forth its scent", Gregory achieves one of the high points in the history of the description of mystical experience³⁷. The image of God in man is such that his glory is reflected in man. With the imagery of fragrances, this is made more explicit: although the divine essence is inaccessible, intangible and incomprehensible, "instead of the Word we have in us this compounded fragrance from the perfection of the virtues" [J89.16]. And because the source of all fragrances is the good odour of the Bridegroom, the fragrance in us imitates the source, so that our goodness is but an imitation of the source of all Goodness, our incorruptibility imitates his incorruptibility; our immutability, his immutability, etc., so much so that as the divine attributes are, as it were, derived from their source and become internalized in us, we see them within ourselves as in a mirror. " For the ray of that true, divine virtue

shine forth in a pure life by the out-flow of *apatheia* and make the invisible visible to us and the inaccessible comprehensible by depicting the sun in the mirror of our souls" [J90.10-13]. The interplay of the image and the Archetype is such that, like the case of Paul the Apostle, the inhalation of the Lord's inaccessible, transcendent fragrance of grace became for him incense unto itself and thus be able to "gave himself to others as incense to take according to their ability" [J91.10], justifying his use of the expression, "we are the good odour of Christ".(2 Cor. 2:15)

The odour of Christ does not confine itself to the individual believer but is distributed to the whole body of the Church, and indeed as is promised in the Gospels (i.e. Jh 12:3; Mt.26:13) will fill the whole world [see J92], for the obvious reason that if a soul inhale the odour, the fragrance flow out of the abundance of his heart and will fill the place where he is, so that those who are in contact will themselves acquire the same sweet odour. But this short statement is to anticipate a fuller treatment in subsequent Homilies³⁸.

2.3.5 A Note on Guarding the Body

Yet the Bride at this stage of her spiritual journey still awaits the consummation of the wedding, but prepares herself in the bridal chamber. She puts a sachet of myrrh close to the location of her heart from which warmth is transmitted to other parts of her body, thus signifying that "she makes all her actions, like parts of the body, seethe with the breath

from her heart so that no iniquity can cool her love for God in any member of her body" [J95.1-3]. This is one of several instances where Gregory makes reference to the body, being closely guarded lest it should fall and thus forfeited from the whole plan of the remaking of man.

2.3.6 Introducing the Theme of the Incarnation

The imagery turns from fragrances to "a cluster of cypress in the vineyards of En-Gadi" as the Canticle text requires.(Canticle 1.14) Gregory is quick to relate the imagery to Christ and his Passion as the Lord himself said of the cup, "this is my blood". But the imagery first and foremost talks about the indwelling of Christ in the believer in various capacity according to the measure of the person receiving him. All persons are in various degrees of maturity in Christ and therefore all holds the promise of full blossoming, all wait "for a grace yet to come... a faith firm in a grace we hope for becomes a delight for us who wait in patience" [J97.8,5]. But we can all look forward to being like the true cluster, "who manifested himself raised upon a cross of wood and whose blood is drink and salvation for persons who are saved and rejoice in him" [J98.15-J99.1], thus anticipating the major theme of the next Homily.

2.4 HOMILY FOUR: ASCENT BY THE PATH OF THE INCARNATION

Gregory's sense of sequence in the description of the progress of human nature in the mystical life provides an occasion to perceive his mind at work in formulating the progressive sanctification of the believer's life. Already in Homilies one to three, he summarises his idea of progress (Homily one), and then he proceeds from the very beginning of human nature as created and related to God; how the Fall appeared and "blackened" the soul; how Grace has found it and restored it to the right path of righteousness and purity (Homily two), and then in Homily three, the soul is seen to realize its potential in its ability to hear again the voice of Him who becomes the One it seeks. But at this stage, it can only imitate the Archetype of its life in virtue. By its sense perception, it is able to identify its lover without the ability of sight as yet. And as a growing shoot in the divine vineyard, it can perceive its source of growth by the measure of its present condition to receive the Lord of its life.

2.4.1 A Restatement of the Story Thus Far

Here, Gregory begins Homily four by restating what he has said thus far by the imagery of blackened gold in the process of purification [J100-J101]. The imagery is a familiar one in the prevailing philosophical speculation of the day, Gregory sees this as an appropriate way of expressing his concept of human nature and fall³⁹. "Human nature was golden at the beginning and shone by reason of its resemblance to the

undefiled good" [J100.7-8], which in this case means the divine nature. The golden texture has been blackened. However:

"God, who fashions all things in his wisdom, cares for his bride's deformity, He does not contrive for her any new beauty which was not formerly there; rather, he leads her back to her first grace by removing what was blackened through evil, changing her colour to one which is not defiled" [J101.1-4].

The language of grace is very much evident here⁴⁰. Two stages of purification, up to this point of the Bride's new life, are done: The beauty is enhanced by the gradual removal of the stain that hides the golden lustre. This is followed by more purification as required. Up to this stage, the Bride is compared to the mount of the king, getting ready to be mounted by the king, but here in Homily four, "her loveliness has become that of a virgin" [J101.12]

2.4.2 A Determining Factor: Free Will

The soul is now set on its return journey to its original glory. But this return journey or ascent is first determined by the God-given free will⁴¹. There follows an exposition of the idea of free will which holds sway the inclination of human nature to either virtue or vice. As Gregory puts it, "Virtue and vice are diametrically opposed to each other, and they can never be present together at one time in the same person" [J103.7-8]⁴². This means that to wherever the inclination of free will moves, it is changed accordingly. (J102.6-7) Human nature is like a mirror, and it takes on

different manifestation according to the impressions of free will. The soul that chooses virtue, is cleansed by the Word from vice, and shines with a reflected light (J104.4 and 15) and this is equivalent to saying that when a person gazes upon an object he receives in himself the image of that object⁴³. And in this case the object is a dove, the symbol of the Holy Spirit, meaning the stamp of the spiritual life shines from within, (J106) implying what is born of the Spirit is spirit⁴⁴. Then is it capable of contemplating Christ's loveliness. Here the soul, having drawn near to the Archetype, has begun the process of replacing vice with virtue, thus, like a polished mirror, she is able to reflect the archetypal beauty that is held up to her.

2.4.3 Ascent as Return to Former Beauty

Right from the start, Gregory introduces his theme with a general statement about the Canticle: "The Song teaches us by these words, about the restoration of beauty for which the bride gained by approaching the true beauty from which she has departed." (J101) The true beauty he referred to here is not quite clear from the text, but as we go through the whole Homily, it becomes clear that he has two ideas in mind, (i). the beauty which was in human nature's original image, and (ii). the beauty which is manifested by God through the Incarnate Christ; so that when the soul sets out on the journey back to its lost beauty, he is also going on the journey in the quest of the beauty of God its Creator. But anything worthy to be

called beautiful must have substance, and hence the Incarnation becomes necessary. (J107) Here the soul's ascent meets with its first phase of encounter with the Incarnate Christ.

2.4.4 Understanding the Ascent Through the Incarnation: The Affinity

In Homily 4, there are visibly three sets of text corresponding to three stages of the relationship between the doctrine of the Incarnation and participation in the divine life as ascent to perfection. The sense of the soul's ascent from one phase into another is verified by the terms like *εἴτα* (then, e.g. J104.16, J107.9) signifying that the sequence of the description of ascent is to be followed in that manner.

Commenting on Canticle 1:16 on "Overshadowing our bed," Gregory sees "overshadowing" as meaning Christ with the covering of his human body which shadowed over the ray of his divinity, and "bed" to mean the blending of human nature with the divine. (J108 and 109.1-3) Here Gregory introduces a concept which seek to explain the role of Christ's human body, so as to enable the presence of divinity amongst mankind bearable⁴⁵. He quotes Exodus 33:20 to make his point, but more importantly, it serves to demonstrate that the blending of human nature with the divine is not only possible but actualised in the Incarnate Christ. Thus the soul is spurred on to perceive the mystery of deification or divinization, realising that union with the divine is brought about by the appearance to mankind of Christ "overshadowed" with a human body.

(J109.3) The mechanics of divinisation is in fact one and *the same* as the mechanics of Incarnation. He quotes the Apostle Paul as saying "the two shall be one flesh" to illustrate his point. Christ's union with the Church is the union of two persons into one body. [Ephesians 5:31-32] The mechanics of these three concepts, that of divine nature of Christ blending with his human nature, that of the union of Christ with the Church and also that of human nature receiving the divine, work in the same manner. But who can understand its mechanics? If Incarnation is a mystery so is the process of divinisation a mystery. But one thing is assured, the soul can be confident to proceed on its ascent because of the manifestation of the Lord's divinity in the flesh. It is as if the soul is a house, built by the Lord, designed by him and even with him as building material. (J109.4)

2.4.5 Understadingⁿ the Ascent Through the Incarnation: The Gulf^h

The second phase of encounter with the Incarnation, Gregory uses Canticle 2:1-3. The identity of the Bride/soul has advanced to another stage, whereas in the first stage of our description, she was called "companion" (ἡ πλησίον μου), in this stage she was call sister (ἡ ἀδελφή μου) (Cant. 2:2) her identity indicates that "she becomes still more sublime and gazes at the mystery through dove's eyes." And what is the mystery she sees? "An apple tree among the trees of wood." (Canticle 2:3) With these

words Gregory introduces the second phase of the encounter with the Incarnation.

Wood here signifies "the material (sensual) side of human life overgrown with a multitude of passions" [J116.7] and the apple tree, "being made of wood, it has material similar to human nature and has been tempted in every way while being without sin." [J116:16-17] This reflection on the Incarnation begins to show the gulf between the saviour and the redeemed, or the Bride and the Bridegroom. Whereas in the previous encounter the soul can be confident of its affinity to the One pursued, as the ascent proceeds, it finds itself lagging behind not in degree but in kind. The Bride is compared to a lily delightful in both sight and scent but the Bridegroom is compared to the apple although also delightful in sight and scent, yet is in a different category and a much higher calibre than the lily⁴⁶. By way of example: Christ is tempted but remains sinless⁴⁷, human nature is tossed between vice and virtue; apples give nourishment but the lily only adorns itself, meaning that Christ can give life, humans cannot; he does not need our goodness, quoting Psalms 15:2, but we need his goodness in order to grow to perfection etc. [J 117]

Yet, in Gregory's description of the soul's ascent, the recognition of this gulf is never an occasion for despair, but it is spurred on by the desire, put in it by God, to long for the manifold enjoyment "for those who have approached it". [J 119.8] Instead of despair, it thirsts for more: "How she leaps and bounds toward what lies before her and does not turn back! And the soul seeks to be supported in its ascent, not only to look to the good, or

participating in it, but also to persevere in it. [J124.12]

2.4.6 Understanding the Ascent Through the Incarnation: The Paradigm

Now comes the third phase of the encounter with the Incarnation. The Incarnate Christ is described as an apple, "Who has sprung up in the forest of our human nature, because of his love for mankind became an apple by participation in our flesh and blood." [J127.18-20] By dwelling in human existence through flesh and blood, he emptied himself, voluntarily partook of our humility even to the point of experiencing death. [J126.20-21] And the soul, by recognising this fact, seek to follow his example in humility, because by coming in the flesh, he has manifested in himself examples of every good and fitting behaviour. Gregory is adamant in emphasising the fact of the Incarnation first, before passing to the effect of Incarnation. Only by recognising the fact of Incarnation can we see the rationale to follow it.

But more importantly the gulf between the Uncreated and the Created, the incomprehensibility of God can only be grasped by faith in the thing seen (τοῦ ὁφθέντος) and "the thing seen" is the Incarnate Christ. [Hom 13, J387:2-5] By the incarnation "God was seen on earth and conversed among men, we have known the pure, immortal beauty of the Bridegroom the Word's divinity, and the splendour of true light by the work of his hands." [Hom 11, J 339.11-14] The incarnate Christ shows what God is like, and the soul in its ascent, by way of looking up to the Incarnate's

examples is assured that his quest is not in vain and is guaranteed of potential of achieving God-likeness, which is another way of saying divinisation⁴⁸. And if our analysis is correct, then the doctrine of Incarnation becomes the very base of the soul's quest for full participation in the divine life, in a broader sense, Christology is made relevant by way of Soteriology⁴⁹. Undoubtedly Homily four is one of the most important passage for understanding the mystical anthropology of Gregory of Nyssa's Homilies on the Song of Songs.

2.4.7 An Ode to Love

"Bring me into the house of wine; set love before me"(Cant.2.5), thus exclaims the Bride in exhilaration. The understanding of her true identity and the path of her ascent creates in her a thirst which cannot be quenched [J120]. She demands to be shown the house containing the mystery of the Bridegroom. "Having entered it, she again leaps up to what is greater, for she seeks to be subjected to love" [J120.15-17]. Perception of the divine mystery leads to love, or being enjoined in love. [J121.3-5] Christ's commandment to love God and man will become a genuine outflowing of the purified person, not just "for appearance sake"⁵⁰.

2.4.8 The Wound of Love

The talk of the doctrine of Incarnation prepares the Bride to receive

in herself, not just the message, but the Sender himself. The ^aim^agery turns to the archer and arrow, and later Gregory skilfully combines it with the image of nuptial delight, all to the effect that the soul is allowed to participate in the groom's eternal incorruptibility, thus the ascent continues without end. This is the clearest statement yet of the truth of divine indwelling in the ascending soul. The Bride delights in "the Bowman for his good marksmanship because he hits her with his arrow" [J127.7-8]. The allegory brings out all aspect of the graceful divine action in a man's soul:

"The bride says 'I am wounded with love' [2.5]. These words indicate that the bridegroom's arrows have penetrated the depths of her heart. The archer of these arrows is love, who sends his own "chosen arrow", the only-begotten Son, to those who are saved, dipping the triple-pointed tip of the arrow in the Spirit of life. The tip of the arrow is faith, and by it God introduces the archer into the heart along with the arrow. As the Lord says, "I and the Father (are one); we will come and make our home with him". [J127.8-18]

This is the first time that Gregory, in these homilies, uses the Trinitarian term in describing the action of indwelling and at the same time manages to drop his Christological hint. The effect of this penetration is that the soul receives the divine life deep within itself. "The arrow's penetration opens up, as it were, a door and entrance for love." [J128.5-7] This divinizing act of God results in the paradox of simultaneous rapid upward ascent and rest in the divine arms, bringing the soul ecstatic life and glory. [J129] Thus, mystical anthropology brings to theological anthropology not just what constitutes ^ta person and his destiny, but how this destiny can be "experienced".

2.5 HOMILY FIVE: FROM GLORY TO GLORY

After the climatic proclamation of Homily four of the Incarnation of Christ and how it is related to the soul in its mystical journey, it is time now to gather up all the important messages in the previous Canticle text. And this Gregory does in Homily Five, without doing violence to the text itself, but as he succinctly puts it: from the present glory to the glory that lies still ahead. In Homily five, Gregory now begins to develop what Daniélou terms *Epektasis* based on Philippians 3:13⁵¹. What is this glory that Gregory is preoccupied with throughout his writings? There are several indications in his Homilies here, and now we can say with some certainty of what he means. His definition is this: following St. Paul, "By glory he [St. Paul] means what we have grasped and found at any given moment. No matter how great and exalted that glory may be, we believe that it is less than that for which we still hope"[J160.6-8] We shall examine this more closely in light of what we have learned so far.

2.5.1 Glory According to the Measure of Growth

The Bridegroom's exhortation to take what is achieved by virtue after the Bride has gone through "the mystical waters" [J77.5], which in other context Gregory means the recovery of the original image of the Archetype⁵², and go on in the pursuit of this Archetypal beauty, "to become beautiful" [J160.2]. Note that Gregory does not use the term "*more*

beautiful". From this context we can infer, at least initially, that in every stage that the Bride ascents^d in beauty, the glory imparted by the Bridegroom is according to the measure of the growth in her spiritual life, exactly like the description of the indwelling Christ in the redeemed person in Homily three:

"The child Jesus born within us advances by different ways in those who receive him in wisdom, in age, and in grace. He is not the same in every person, but is present according to the measure of the person receiving him. He sows himself according to each one's capacity" [J96.8-13].

Could we then see any connection between the soul's ascent from glory to glory with the indwelling Incarnate Christ in Homily four? What we can say, up to this point, is that the more the soul is attuned to virtue, the more it is opened to receive Christ. It is as if attaining of virtue provides the occasion for the purification of the soul *and* body, and becomes the receptacle for the indwelling of Christ⁵³. This is so if we are to take what Gregory understands as the image of God in man transforming "from glory to glory" as having an intimate and definite link with the doctrine of the Incarnation. It is to say that there is no proper understanding of divinisation or remaking of man without a proper understanding the *substantial* reality of the Incarnation of Christ in the historical plane.

2.5.2 Epektasis as Order and Method

In Homily five, the beloved's answer to the Bride came not once but twice in the Canticle text⁵⁴, with a similar call to arise, "Arise, come, my

companion, my fair one, my dove." (Canticle 2:10 and 2:13) This gives Gregory an occasion to expound his doctrine of *Epektasis*:

"For one who has been called to rise in this way can always rise further, and one who runs to the Lord will always have wide open spaces before him. And so we must constantly rise and never cease drawing closer."[J159.15-17]

This becomes obvious when we examine closely what Gregory says of the divine goodness [see J158]. God is all good, which means that God is incapable of having fellowship with evil. When God calls the human soul to participate in himself, the soul participates in the divine goodness. But because this divine goodness is simple and unlimited, the soul that participates in this goodness grows continually. But "the more the soul participates in it, the more she recognizes that it transcends her as much as before" [J158.20]. Even the way the Bride perceives the Bridegroom is constantly changing in images, not that the Groom is changeable, but that no single, and for that matter any, image can adequately describe the One that is indescribable. This makes for the necessity of using all available sense perception.

The images serve a cumulative factor, but because of the inadequacy of all images, the cumulative factor will never reach its goal. Thus the Bride is left with the desire for more images⁵⁵.

At first it seems that this could only lead to an existential despair. The quest for perfection seems doomed to failure. Gregory empathizes with the seeker after truth, but thinks that every step on the way is a step of grace, and should be approached on its own terms. Lest the soul in quest of its Beloved should not recognise the path, "the Song's text draws human

nature to God by a certain method and order"[J145.1-2]. And a bulk of Homily five is occupied with showing how. It turns out to be wholly Scriptural in nature. With the aid of the bride's sense perception, hearing "the voice of my beloved" and "behold, he comes", Gregory effectively writes down his theory of the two dispensations of the salvation of man, a kind of biblical theology of the Word.

2.5.3 Biblical Doctrine of Growth

Before the Incarnation, we 'heard' the word of God through the precepts of the Law and the proclamation of the Prophets. But this does not mean that the word of God was from afar and thus lost the impact of immediacy⁵⁶. Although the Groom "stands behind the wall", he is "looking [and speaking] through the windows" [Canticle 2:9]. Gregory emphasizes the importance of this gesture: "The lover speaks through the windows to the bride dwelling within, and the wall between them does not prevent them from conversing since the Bridegroom's head peeps through the lattices into the house's interior" [J144.12-15]. The splendour of the true light shines through the Law and the Prophets. This creates a desire in the soul to be out of the confines of the darkened house "to see the sun in the open air" [J145.12].

With the Incarnation, the soul's desire is realized, but not as it thought, to abandon the house so as to seek the sun in the open air, but "the true light appears to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of

death and this light blends itself with our human nature"⁵⁷ [J145.9-10]. This is revealed in the Gospel, testified first by the turtledove of springtime, the forerunner John the Baptist, and then by the records of the works of Christ⁵⁸. Here Gregory effectively blends two interlinking concepts: The fact of the Incarnation is that the divine blends itself with human nature, and by the same mechanics, Christ's light shine in the soul and dispose of the power of darkness and death, "the air within the house was joined with (συναπύεται) the heavenly light" [J148.17]. This is another way of describing the central theme in Homily four.

2.5.4 Springtime of the New Life

The effect of this "union" is that the frozen heart in the cold of idolatry is melted by the Sun of Righteousness, creating the spring of a new life, "mankind which had been turned into stone by the cold, might be warmed by the Spirit and by the rays of the Word and so became once again like water leaping up into eternal life" [J147.21-148.1]. But spring is the interim period between winter and summer. And the soul in the springtime of the new life can hope to be like the fig tree that has put forth its young figs. As it turns out the imagery is appropriate to Gregory's anthropology. He describes it thus:

"The fig draws moisture from deep within the earth when the weather is hot. When a certain amount of liquid has collected within the tree, it rejects by a natural process through the ends of its branches what is superfluous and impure. This

process is repeated over and over until the tree puts forth pure, nourishing fruit at the proper time, having been cleansed of every undesirable quality. Before producing sweet and perfect fruit, the fig tree puts forth a kind of forerunner called a 'young fig' which is sometimes edible for those who wish to take it" [J155.1-10].

The comparison is apt. Human nature "gathers evil moisture during the 'winter' of the spirit", the difference here is that it does not reject the impure by itself, it is the Lord of the spring that does so, and yet does so "through our confession". Then does he add to us the distinctive marks of hope and maturity. The Bride at this stage is described as a young fig, meaning that whatever she has achieved is but a forerunner of what is hers when she attains maturity.

2.5.5 Growing through the Scriptures

Thus the ascent continues. Yet the path to maturity is a narrow one. Thus when the Bridegroom calls the Bride to "come by yourself, my dove, in the shelter of the rock, near the wall" (Canticle 2:14), two things comes to mind: The Bride must now be guided only by her own desire and longing for what is better, not by coercion. Secondly, the distance between the rock, the symbol of the Gospel, and the wall, the symbol of the rigid following of the Law, is a short one. "The rock rejects all the corporeal observances of the Law and elevates the meaning of the words to the spiritual and intellectual realm" [J163.5-7]. This is not just a statement of Gregory's exegetical principle, but also a statement of the supremacy of the Lamb, the

blood and the Pasch who is Christ and who circumscribes the old and the new dispensations [see J162 and J163]. The Bride can now clearly identify her Bridegroom through and only through the Scriptures.

2.5.6 "Catch the Little Foxes"

Not being content with identifying her Beloved, the Bride desires to finally see him in person. Before this could be fulfilled, there are matters still outstanding. Amongst the most important is what the Canticle text described as catching "the little foxes" (Canticle 2:15), the symbol for the Devil and his entire host of demonic legions, so called, instead of comparing them to the mighty wild boars and the raging lions, because they are "wretched and miserable creatures" in comparison to the sole and true power of God, although they are capable of great destruction [see J165-J168]. We are unclear as to who the hunters are, but the ineffable greatness of the divine power can cause this to happen. But those who have come clear of the reign of the evil one become like "the flock who feed among the lilies" (Cant.2:16), i.e. fed by the true Word and the Spirit, as against those who still exist in the fabled Platonic cave, regarding shadow and vanity as reality itself [J170.1-2]⁵⁹.

2.6 HOMILY SIX: BEYOND THE REALM OF THE SENSES

Homily five ends with the Bride finally able to bring in her sense of sight. In many and varied ways the Bride is brought to the realization of

her worth, that she was in the beginning created immortal and beautiful, and because of sin, she entered into a stage of blackened state, but her willingness to lead a life of virtue together with the grace of her Creator⁶⁰, brought her back to the path of purity where she again is able to see her original beauty as a reflection of the Archetype who created her. But having tasted beauty and purity, her appetite is whetted for the True and the Real, the Archetypal Beauty. But first she is reminded that this journey is not a groping in the dark, neither is it a Plotinian's flight of the alone to Alone⁶¹. It is solidly based on the provision of God through the Incarnation in human form of Christ. In contemplating the Incarnation, the Bride sees the root and mechanics of achieving her goal. By keeping herself in virtue and purity, she becomes a receptacle for the indwelling Christ, the True and the Archetypal Beauty. But because the beauty that is now beginning to reveal itself in her is different in kind to the Archetype, as the Created to the Uncreated, the desire to bridge the gap becomes overpowering, and this spurs her on to greater glory. Thus from "glory to glory" she is transformed and as St. Paul verified: "the stretching out to what lies before is related to forgetfulness of earlier accomplishments" [J174.14-16].

Throughout the previous homilies, Gregory plods through the imageries in the Canticle texts and seeks to explain the path of spiritual ascent through these imageries. The journey requires the employment of all the sense perceptions. Thus the Bride acquires and derives her sweet smell by being attracted to the bridegroom's fragrance, and she in turns exudes the acquired sweet fragrance to others around her, thus is called the odour

of Christ. Because her hearing faculty is sharpened by purification, she can hear her beloved calling to her and beckons her to further glory and so on.

2.6.1 Vision of God is but a Prelude to Union with God

Homily six provides an occasion to pause and take stock of what has been achieved before plunging into something completely different. It is as if Gregory is trying to assure his audience that it is very commendable that the soul can come thus far from the depth of sin and evil. And it is to count these as nothing compared to what lies ahead, nothing of what is achieved previously prepares the Bride to face the next phase of her mystical ascent. The soul is unaware of this at first. When, according to the Canticle text, the Bride is called to forsake the wall's shadow and take her rest upon the rock's shelter near the wall (Cant 2:14), she assumes this must be the ultimate achievement, for she seems to attain the vision of God⁶²:

"Through all these things the bride becomes even more perfect saying that she is worthy to openly see her spouse's face and to listen to him directly instead of through intermediaries.

It is right for the soul to be glad since she has reached in her lofty ascent the summit of her desires. For what greater happiness can be conceived of than to see God?" [J178.19-22]

Even with the casting away of the Evil one still to be called for, once this is accomplished, "the two spouses are united: God is in the soul, and the soul once again dwells in God" (ὁ τε γὰρ θεὸς ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ γίνεται καὶ πάλιν εἰς τὸν Θεὸν ἡ ψυχὴ μετοικίζεται) [J179.5-7]. It does seem that an even higher summit is reached here after the vision of God, the union with God in the soul, "What can be higher than being in the beloved and having

him in oneself?"[J179.13] The Bride soon finds out that the elated state of seeing a glimpse of the Bridegroom is but a preparation for her union with the Groom. Yet the Bride senses this presence of the Bridegroom so near and yet so far. Why?

2.6.2 Limitation of Sensual Preception

Gregory gives two reasons for this endless quest: The greatness of God's nature is not limited and knowledge cannot be limited or exhausted. This is in clear contrast to Origen's idea⁶³. Gregory puts it in no uncertain terms: "The mind running on high through its understanding of transcendent reality should realize that all perfection of knowledge attainable by human nature is only the beginning of a desire for more lofty things" [J180.4-7].

The Bride has come to the stage when all sense faculties cannot help her to attain further knowledge of the divine nature. Up to this stage, they have served him well, but now they seem to be a hindrance to her progress. Try as she may, she cannot break through their limitedness. Thus "far from attaining perfection, she has not even come near to it". Sense perceptions cannot carry her beyond their own limitation. Thus she seems to plunge into the unknown once again, not that she has lost everything that she has accomplished so far, but that they can only become her temporary solace and resting place before the next leg of her quest: the invisible realm where God is.

The gulf between the visible and the invisible realm is like the gulf between the Created and the Uncreated, the difference in kind not just in degree⁶⁴. All sense perceptions that have proven useful in the visible realm must now be abandoned, the soul is immediately plunged into what Gregory describes as "the divine night":

"When I enter the invisible realm after having forsaken sensual perception, I am embraced by the divine night, and I seek him hidden in the cloud. Then did I love my desired one, even though He escaped my thoughts. For 'I sought him on my bed at night,' that I might know his substance, beginning, and end, and in what his being consists, but 'I did not find him.' I called him by name as far as it was in my power to find him who lacks a name, yet the meaning of a name would not help me attain him whom I seek." [J181.10-21]

Thus Gregory's polemical argument with Eunomius⁶⁵ here helps him in his description of the beyond sensual experience of the soul's spiritual ascent. The One sought after, who transcends every name [J182.1], is glorious and sanctified without end.

2.6.3 A More Perfect Way

The Bride seeks another way of attaining the knowledge of the One she sought. She presumes that if he cannot be found using the material sensual perception, then she should approach her quest through the immaterial realm, i.e. the spiritual, transcendent realm. Earlier in the Homily, Gregory takes some care in introducing his philosophical cosmology, which is often mentioned in his other works⁶⁶. All creation is divided into two distinct classes, one sensible and material, the other, intelligible and

spiritual. "The sensible is grasped by sense, while the intelligible transcends sensible comprehension" [J173.9-10]. The intelligible is free from constraint and is without limit. This is the realm of the Uncreated. But in the Created realm, the angelic rank also belongs to the intelligible. So the Bride, after exhausting her search in the sensible realm, would then turn to the intelligible realm. How this is achieved is not clear, but one thing is sure: Gregory presents a case that represents a thorough search by all known ways, including the angelic rank, in order to demonstrate the thorough incomprehensibility of God by all Created realm.

The only conclusion now for the Bride is to admit to failure. "She realizes that her sought-after love is known only in her impossibility to comprehend his essence, and that every sign becomes a hindrance to those who seek him"[J183.2-5].

Every sign then must be abandoned. When the Bride says that, "When I passed them by a little" (Canticle 3:3), Gregory takes this to mean that the Bride has foresaken every manner of comprehension, and then takes a leap in the dark, so to speak: she then finds her lover via another way, Faith!

Knowledge can only takes the bride as far as recognizing her beloved but only faith can ecstatically transport her into the embrace of her beloved Groom. In *De Vita Moysis*, the phenomenon is associated with the experience of Moses entering the darkness of God's presence⁶⁷, what Gregory describes as the second darkness, where all sense perception is useless in the prevailing darkness, causing the seeker to turn to faith as the

only guide to the ultimate goal of the contemplation of the living God.

2.6.4 Praises for the Beautified Soul

If the divine night can be compared to Moses entering the darkness, then what follows in Homily six can be contrasted with the experience of Moses when he again descended from the mountain to be back with the Israelites. Whereas Moses, upon descent, met with envy from the people⁶⁸, the Bride is greeted, not with envy but praises. For the Cantic text immediately turns its attention to the exclamation of the Bridegroom's friends when they behold the beauty of the Bride after the experience, "Who is this who comes up from the wilderness as pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the powders of the performer?" (Cant.3:6) The friends are astonished at what they behold, not only at the extend of her ascent from blackness at the beginning of her quest for purification, but also at the depth from which she arose [J186]. The mention of the powders of the performer reminds Gregory of actors putting on masks to play several characters, thus symbolises "persons advancing in virtues, being transformed from glory to glory, they do not always remain in the same character, but according to the degree of perfection established in each person, a different character will shine in their lives"⁶⁹ [J186.6-11]. The pillars of smoke rising from the wilderness symbolises the beauty of virtue rising from a parched, inhabitable and unfavourable condition, testifying to the bride's great change and transformation. She is especially praiseworthy

because she strove in adverse condition through continence and diligence to achieve this state [J188], mortifying her members on earth as buried with the Lord, after that having had this "myrrh" mixed with frankincense, admits sweet smell for the benefit of all [J189].

2.6.5 The Purified Senses

With the description the king's nuptial bed (Canticle 3:7-8), Gregory shows how the beautified soul wages battle against the power of darkness in order to preserve its purity. The soul's beauty now is pure and will cause fear against dark, nocturnal thoughts and the enemies in the darkness and strikes at them with the sword of the Word [J192-193]. The sixty mighty warriors are the five senses (five multiplied by the twelve tribes), now purified, turn their attention to the service of the beautified soul. Thus "the sword of the eye always looks upon the Lord to see correctly and is never defiled by the sight of anything unclean. Likewise, the sword of hearing listens to the divine precepts and never receives a vain word", etc. [J196.2-6]

2.6.6 The Beautified Soul and the Body of Christ

The description of one big bed for all introduces the theme of the cluster of the Homilies (Homilies 7 to 10): the relation of the soul in ascent with the mystical body of Christ, the Church. By piling up several imageries

("one battle-line, one army, one bed, that is one Church, and one people who will become one bride united in harmony in the fellowship on one body under one commander, one leader and one Bridegroom" [J197.17-198-2]), Gregory finds solidarity and rest for the soul in flight with others of like mind and pursuit, free of passion, thus introduces the social and ecclesiastical aspect to the theme of the remaking of man.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. A. Meredith, "God-fittingness in Gregory of Nyssa," SP, p512.
2. The interrelations of Jewish exegetical theory and practice and early Christian exposition of scripture are complex. On the influence of Philo on patristic allegorical methodology, see Chapter Five *passim*, see also R.P.C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event: A study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture* (London: SCM, 1959) pp.97-129; and especially H A Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers: Faith, Trinity, Incarnation* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1970) pp.24-72.
3. See Chapter Five, *passim*.
4. We can be almost certain that Origen "borrowed" his ideas also from Philo, eg., the explanation of the three books of Solomon, the six Songs culminating in the seventh, i.e. the Canticle, etc. See Lawson, pp.46-50. On possible dialogue between Origen and Jewish scholars on the Canticle, see R. Kimelman, "Rabbi Yohanan and Origen on the Song of Songs: a Third-Century Jewish-Christian Disputation", HTR 73(1980) 567-595, and more generally, N R M de Lange, *Origen and the Jews: Studies in Jewish-Christian Relation in Third-Century Palestine* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976).
5. Gregory later expounds in subsequent Homilies, especially Homily eleven, the implication of this putting on of the new garment in terms of the initiation rite of baptism. See also Origen's exposition of the outer and inner man in the prologue to his own Commentary (Lawson, pp.23-39), the implication there is that, like Gregory of Nyssa after him, St. Paul's advice of stripping the Old Man (cf. J14.13-16) is a fitting status for those who would understand the message of the Canticle.
6. Origen has this to say: "But if any man who lives only after the flesh should approach it, to such a one the reading of this Scripture will be the occasion of no small hazard and danger. For he, not knowing how to hear love's language in purity and with chaste ears, will twist the whole manner of his hearing of it away from the inner spiritual man and on to the outward and carnal; and he will turn away from the spirit to the flesh, and will foster carnal desires in himself, and it will seem to be the Divine Scriptures that are thus urging and egging him on to fleshly lust!" (Or Comm Pro, Lawson, p22, *Com (sc 3) 1, 6*)

7. See also J23.16-20 and J27.
8. See Philo's work, *De Abrahamo* 125-30 and also cf. Clem Alex *Strom* IV 53.1. See also Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992) p.23-4.
9. See Chapter Four, Homily fifteen.
10. Origen certainly thinks so, basing, if not on anything else, on the title given to Solomon as the Son of David which is also the title for Christ.
11. Cf. Or Comm Pro. Lawson, pp.39-44. *sc 375, Com Proel 3, 1-20*
12. Origen tends to be more thorough in his exposition, bringing in a variety of Scriptural verses and imageries to prove his point. Eg. the title of God as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob as the similar idea of spiritual ascent (Or Comm Pro, Lawson, pp.44-45).
13. Origen has only this to say about Ecclesiastes: "And so from Proverbs he goes on to Ecclesiastes, who teaches, as we said, that all visible and corporeal things are flitting and brittle; and surely once the seeker after wisdom has grasped that these things are so, he is bound to spurn and despise them..." (Or Comm Pro, Lawson, p.44). Gregory however goes on to full exposition of Ecclesiastes.
14. See Or Comm Pro, Lawson, pp.46-50, *sc 375, Com Proel 4, 1-14*.
15. V.E.F. Harrison tends to see Gregory's use of gender shift as a deliberate gender reversal, projecting an image that Gregory is in favour of representing the spiritual life as feminine, thus putting a high regard on female saints in an male dominating environment. See her article, "A Gender Reversal in Gregory of Nyssa's First Homily on the Song of Songs." SP 27(1993) 34-38.
16. As we will see in Chapter four *passim*, different understanding of the character of the Bride creates different interpretation of the Canticle as a whole. Some even go so far as saying that, "Gregory oscillates between these various interpretations of the Bride, without always stopping to point out where he is going" (I.M. Shea, *The Church According to Saint Gregory of Nyssa's Homilies on the Canticle of Canticles*, (Baltimore: Pontificae Universitatis Gregorianae, 1968), p.31); as we shall prove in the course of the analysis and integration of his thought of the Canticle, this is quite unfounded. L. Scheper, *The Spiritual Marriage: the Exegetic History and Literary Impact of the Song of Songs in the Middle Ages*, (PhD dissertation; Princeton University, 1971) on p.404, recognises this when he says that, "But none of the early Fathers

- pursued the interpretation of the Song of Songs with regard to the individual's spiritual experience more thoroughly and fruitfully than did a married bishop and mystic of the fourth century, Gregory of Nyssa."
17. Moses is the prime example for the development of the doctrine of Epektasis, as Gregory's writing *De Vita Moysis* testifies. Later in subsequent Homilies, the symbol of Moses is frequently used, eg. Homily ten.
 18. Cf. V.E.F. Harrison, "Receptacle Imagery in St. Gregory of Nyssa's Anthropology." SP 22(1989),23-27; *idem. Grace and Human Freedom According to St. Gregory of Nyssa*, (NY: The Edwin Mellen Press,1992),104-131.
 19. "This fruit is tart and its skin lacks nourishment. Therefore, the exercise of temperance rightly partakes of contemplation, for just as the pomegranate's tart skin is nourishing and guards the fruit's sweetness by completely surrounding it, so is a harsh, austere life of self-control a guardian for the benefits of temperance." [J230.10-15]
 20. Gregory's link with his brother Basil's monastic interest is well known. It has led most scholars to associate Gregory's intention in writing these homilies with his interest in propagating the monastic/ascetic way of life. See W. Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature* (Leiden: Brill 1954) pp.106-114; *idem. Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (NY:OUP 1969) p.99; Daniélou, *From Glory to Glory* pp.3-10; Völker, *Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker* pp.19-22.
 21. This is to be one of many major differences between Gregory and Origen, cf. Or Comm. II. pp.92-107. Origen sees the Bride's blackness as lowly origin of the Gentile Church in confrontation with the Jewish Church, appealing for harmony within.
 22. DAR, PG 46,116.
 23. Cf. J51; J54; J100, where the same idea comes through repeatedly.
 24. See especially his exposition in DHO. For a more systematic treatment see E.V. McClear, "The Fall of Man and Original Sin in the Theology of Gregory of Nyssa" TS 9(1948) 175-212.
 25. In De Virg. 12 , he lists "life, reason, wisdom, and all the good things of God" that are included in the divine image. Immortality is taken for granted to be included also in the image: " Since eternity is also one of the good attributes of the divine nature, it is essential that the constitution of our own nature should not be

- deprived of this. It had to have an immortal element, so that it might, by this inherent faculty, recognize the transcendent and have the desire for the immortality of God. The account of creation sums all this up in a single expression when it says that mankind was created 'in the image of God'. For a thorough investigation of the Cappadocian doctrine of the image of God, see J. Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture* (New Haven: Yale UP 1993), pp.120-35. And J.M. Muckle, "The Doctrine of Gregory of Nyssa on Man as the Image of God" *Medieval Studies*, 7(1945) 55-84.
26. Gregory's doctrine of Freewill is well attested in his other works, see Chapter two for fuller formulation in his theological anthropology. Here Gregory merely picks up the doctrine to explicate the cause of the darkening of the soul.
 27. For a summary of Gregory's concept of Grace, see A.S. Dunstone, "The Meaning of Grace in the Writings of Gregory of Nyssa" *SJT* 15(1962) 235-244. For a more detailed treatment see Verna E.F. Harrison, *Grace*, op.cit., pp.209-250.
 28. Cf. DAR PG 46,89C. The unfortunate Geek translation of the Hebrew text which has no such Greek philosophical connotation becomes an occasion for introducing Greek ideas, which, in the context of both Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, not only serve the climate of their particular theology well, but also help confirm their suspicion that the Biblical religion anticipated Geek philosophy. For Gregory, "knowing yourself" comes to mean that man by contemplating the virtues of the image of God in himself which is restored by carthasis see the attributes of God of which he is a reflections and so sees the deity itself, see Muckle, art.cit., 74. See also Cherniss, op.cit., p40. For Gregory's probable knowledge of *First Alcibiades* 1.132f, see G.B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers*, (Massachusetts: HUP, 1959), p.97.
 29. Or Comm II, p130. *sc 375, Livre II, 7-9*
 30. For the details of the spiritual journey as traced by the selected episodes in the life of Moses, especially his first stage of journey of Light, see *Moysis* II. 19-41. The episode concern is Moses' divine encounter before the burning bush. See also Louth, *The Origin of the Christian Mystical Tradition* op.cit. pp.84-5; P.F. O'Connell, "The Double Journey in Saint Gregory of Nyssa: *The Life of Moses*" *GOTR* 28(1983) 305-7; S.J. Denning-Bolle, "Gregory of Nyssa: The Soul in Mystical Flight" *GOTR* 34(1989) 105-8.
 31. Cf. this Chapter, 2.1.4.

32. Already in Gregory's earlier works, he often refers to this interplay between types and Archetype, eg. the Archetype and image in the Mirror in Beat.6 and DHO 12, PG 44.161C. See also H.A.Blair, "Allegory" op.cit. 163-6; G.E. Gould, "Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa on the Beatitudes" SP 22(1989) 14-22.
33. Cf. *Moysis II*. 152-161. Gregory is to use the same Mosaic imagery repeatedly, eg. Homily twelve, J354-357.
34. *Moysis I*.10. See also De perf. pp.213.4-214.6: "Therefore, let not a person be grieved by the fact that his nature is mutable; rather, by always being changed to what is better and by being transformed from glory to glory, let him so be changed: by daily growth he always becomes better and is always being perfected yet never attains perfection's goal. For perfection truly consists in never stopping our increase towards the better nor to limit perfection in any boundary". For detailed analysis of this idea see especially Daniélou, *Platonisme*, op.cit. and also C.W. Macleod, "The Preface to Gregory of Nyssa's Life of Moses" JTS 33(1982) 183-191. For a contrast with Greek conception, see Danielou, "La Colombie at la ténèbre dans la mystique byzantine ancienne" *Eranos Jahrbuch* 23(1954) 400-405.
35. See his theological treatment of the theme in Chapter One, *passim*.
36. See n.32 above.
37. For a fuller appreciation of the symbol of the sensual overlap, see V.E.F. Harrison, *Grace* op.cit. pp.61-87.
38. See Homilies five, J156-J157; seven, J241-242, etc.
39. See A. Meredith, "Gregory of Nyssa and Plotinus" SP 17 (1982) 1120-1126.
40. See Gregory's identical treatment using different metaphor in this Chapter, 2.2.3.
41. See a more detailed treatment in Chapter two, *passim*. For other passages relevant to Gregory's mystical treatment of the subject, see *Moysis II*. 74, 80, 81, 87, etc. Eg. "It was not some constraining power from above that caused the one to be found in darkness and the other in light, but we men have in ourselves, in our own nature and by our own choice, the causes of light or of darkness, since we have placed ourselves in whichever sphere we wish to be" *Moysis II*. 80.

42. For the relation between Free Will and evil, see A.A. Mosshammer, "Non-Being and Evil in Gregory of Nyssa." VC 44(1990) 136-67.
43. Cf. *Beat.* 6.
44. This concept is repeated throughout the Homilies, eg. Homily 5, J169; Homily 7, J219; Homily 14, J403; Homily 15, J467.
45. For a fuller exposition of his Christological speculation, see Or. Cat. 9-25. For a general Patristic Christological treatment, see A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon*. (London: Mowbray 1965); on Gregory of Nyssa's Christology, see pp.279-287.
46. Behind this recognition of the difference in kind is perhaps the concept of the gulf that exists between the Created and Uncreated, thus participation in God or divinisation, "was never intended to mean the incorporation into the very being of God himself. It was intended to imply rather that man would come to share derivatively in that immortal and changeless perfection, which is characteristic of the divine realm in conspicuous contrast to the human," M. Wiles, *The Christian Fathers* (London: SCM 1966) p.60.
47. On Christ's sinlessness, see J.H. Srawley, "St.Gregory of Nyssa on the Sinlessness of Christ" JTS 7(1906) 434-441: "[Gregory's] dominant conception of the Incarnation is the exaltation of human nature by union with the divine." p. 440.
48. C.W. Macleod recognises the typological method in Gregory's linking Incarnation with redemption, and that the symbolism implies a clear dogmatic argument: "God is unknowable: but Christ can be known either through the powers which are in 'Him' or through his incarnate nature... In other words, the reverse side of Gregory's negative theology is Christian faith: in the very darkness which surrounds God we see the 'tabernacle', Christ," in Macleod, "Allegory and Mysticism in Origen and Gregory of Nyssa," JTS,NS, (22)1971, p.378.
49. D.F. Winslow, "Christology and Exegesis in the Cappadocians" CH 40(1971) 389-396.
50. J122.16-17: θεὸν δὲ τοσοῦτον ὅσον δεκῆιν. For a comparison between Greek and Gregory's usage of the illusion of love, see H. Musurillo, "The Illusion of Prosperity in Sophocles and Gregory of Nyssa" AJP 82(1962) 182-187; idem. "A Note on Gregory of Nyssa's Commentary on the Song of Solomon, Homily IV" In: *Didascaliae. Studies in Honor of Anselm M. Albareda* ed. Sesto Prete

(NY:Rosenthal 1961) pp.321-326.

51. Daniélou, *Platonisme*, pp.309-326; *idem. From Glory to Glory*, pp. 56-71.
52. In the third Homily [J77.5] the mystical water means the process by which a person is liberated from the evil forces; like the Israelites, "he must leave behind every thought of Egypt, every evil and sin in the water" [J77.6-7]. The imagery strongly implies the rite of baptism with which the person is initiated to the path back to his Architype.
53. See A. Meredith, "Gregory of Nyssa and Plotinus," SP 17[3] (1982), p.1124: "Souls [in Gregory's thought] are like buckets, whose capacity increases the more they receive. This process is unending and does not stop even after death". In some sense this comment corresponds with the theory of epektasis with respect to the individual's growth and his capacity to increase without end. See also Harrison, *Grace*, pp.140-131.
54. The repetition serves to indicate the unending call and progress of the soul to reach out to greater glory, thus each call is an exhortation not to be satiated with the present state of perfection, but is only a preparatory state in which the subsequent call is perceived and heard. It seems that, of all the ancient interpreters, only Gregory took the refrain seriously as a significant point in developing his mystical theology; Origen certainly has another *sitz im leben* for the call, taking the drama of the Bride and the Groom into another direction (Or Comm. III. Lawson, pp.205-254).
55. this is to anticipate the theory that there will come a time when all images will be futile for the soul in flight and thus enter into the "darkness where God is", see Gregory's detailed argument in Homily eleven.
56. Contrary to Shea's exertion, "In OT times the Word was like a gazelle, looking down upon man from afar, as it were, almost like a spectator." (p.56, parag 89) Shea's exposition lies perhaps with his traslation of J141.12-13: διὰ τοῦτο δορυκάδι μὲν ὁμοιοῦται ὁ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἐπιβλέψας. Shea's translation is, "that is why he is compared ... to a gazelle who looks down upon the earth from heaven". A more likely translation would be McCambley's, "he who looks down from heaven upon the earth, is liken to a gazelle". This fits perfectly with the previous sentence, "And so the one who surveys and sees all things is named the God of all creation from the fact that he sees all". Thus God is never a spectator, but because he sees all, is also involved in all, first through the Law and the Prophets, and then through his Son.

57. Both Gregory of Nyssa and Plotinus agree on the rising of the soul to its original perfection. The ascent is envisaged, "as growth towards a previously unpossessed condition, but as the purification of all alien elements," Meredith, "Plotinus" art.cit. 1122. The difference lies in the fact that Gregory could not emphasize the importance of divine grace enough, as J145.9-10 indicates, whereas according to Meredith, for Plotinus, "[The soul] requires nothing external to make it more beautiful -no grace, that is_ and it is able to recover lost loveliness without any outside aid", *ibid.* 1123.
58. See J148, J154, and J161.
59. Cf. Republic vii 514a-517e; For Gregory's usage of this imagery, see A. Meredith, "Plato's 'cave'(Republic vii 514a-517e) in Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa," SP 49-61.
60. The doctrine of synergism is well attested in the works of Gregory, Homily eleven, *passim*, expounds more fully this doctrine in the consideration of the work of the Holy Spirit in the mystical life of the believer. See also W. Jeager, *Two Rediscovered Works*, pp.85-109; E. Mühlenberg, "Synergism in Gregory of Nyssa", ZNW 68(1977), 93-122; D.C. Abel, "The Doctrine of Synergism in Gregory of Nyssa's *De Institutio Christiano*", Thomist 45(1980), 430-448.
61. Enneads, VI.9.11. In Gregory's doctrine of the soul's mystical flight, grace and the divine presence seem to be very strong in the agenda, whereas in Plotinus, the essence of the mystical quest is the solitary way that leads to the One; "the One has no concern for the soul that seeks him, nor has the Soul more than a passing concern for others engaged in the same quest: it has no companions", A. Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, p.51. For Gregory, "the companions" in the soul's flight come in the context of the church, see Homilies seven to ten. For a detailed analysis of Plotinus' mysticism, see J.M. Rist, *Plotinus: the Road to Reality*, (Cambridge: CUP 1967); W.P. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, 2 vol. (3rd. ed. London: Longmans, Green Co. 1941).
62. Elsewhere, especially in Beat. 6, Gregory reverts the desire of the soul for the vision of God into an interiorised perception through the divine image in the soul itself: "Wherefore it is true both that the pure in heart sees God and that no one has ever seen God. In fact he who is invisible by nature becomes visible by his ἐνερπείαι, appearing to us in the particular surrounding of his nature", (PG 44.1269). The ambiguity of the concept of the vision of God in theological speculation in fact assists Gregory in developing his mystical theology: the desire for the vision of God

does in fact spurs the soul on to a greater quest. E. Ferguson in commenting on Gregory's *De Vita Moysis*, brings out the concept succinctly, "Gregory explains that Moses' request to see God is both granted and denied. Indeed it was granted in what was denied. God fulfilled Moses' desire but did not promise any cessation or satiety of the desire...The true sight of God is that the 'one who looks to God never ceases' in the desire to see him", in, "Progress in Perfection: Gregory of Nyssa's *Vita Moysis*", SP 14(1976) 310-311. For patristic doctrine of the vision of God see, V. Lossky, *The Vision of God*, (NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press 1983); K.E. Kirk, *The Vision of God*, (London: Longmans, Green Co 1931).

63. Origen seems reluctant to entertain the notion of the ultimate unknowability of God, and the notion of darkness is but a prelude to the light that makes all things known. See Or Comm Jn II.28. See also A. Louth, *Mystical Tradition*, ibid. pp. 71-74.
64. See Hom four, parag 8-10.
65. I.e. The debate on the contrast between the Creator and the creation, especially in CE I,105-113. For the importance of the Eunomian controversy in shaping this emphasis in the contrast, see Hans U. von Balthasar, *Présence et Pensée: Essai sur la philosophie religieuse de Grégoire de Nysse*, (Paris: Beauchesne 1942); Daniélou, *Platonisme*; D. Balas, *Metousia Theou: Man's Participation in God's Perfections according to Saint Gregory of Nyssa*, (Rome: Herder 1966); E. Muhlenburg, *Die Unendlichkeit Gottes bei Gregor von Nyssa*, (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck, Ruprecht 1966). See especially, A.A. Mosshammer, "The Created and the Uncreated in Gregory of Nyssa", in *El "Contra Eunomium I" en la Produccion Literaria de Gregorio de Nisa* (Pamplona 1988), pp.353-380.
66. For a summary of Gregory's cosmology and relevant texts, see J. Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, op.cit. pp.90-107; 248-263.
67. Ex. 20:21. *Moysis*, II. 162-169. See also Hom eleven, J330.
68. *Moysis*, II. 256-263.
69. Cf. this Chapter, 2.1.1.

CHAPTER THREE

HOMILIES SEVEN TO TEN

3.1 HOMILY SEVEN: THE BEAUTIFIED SOUL IN ECCLESIASTICAL CONTEXT

With Homily Seven, the Bride of the previous Homilies re-enters the world of humanity. She was shown to be capable of scaling spiritual heights that even the Bridegroom's friends felt amazed. The Bride, indeed, does not exist in isolation. The world is the sphere where she finds her realm of growth in virtue. Much as the philosophic *paideia* of the Greek School¹, the soul is "educated" in the media of conflicting forces of good and evil. But the discerning soul, free to choose, opted for virtue and in her train, brings with her like-minded souls by her examples and her urgings. Homilies seven to ten concentrate on the beautified soul descending from the mount of glory to be with men. Like Moses, the prime example, she met God in the darkness, and when descended to men, shows the capability of all men to achieve that spiritual height.

3.1.1 The Soul, Christ and the Church

The context in this cluster of homilies (i.e. Homilies seven to ten) is the Church, the body of Christ. Here in Homily seven, we see Gregory's intention in paralleling the flight of the Church to perfection with the flight of the individual soul. As in Homily four, where Gregory specifically stated

that the mechanics of the Incarnation and the union of Christ and his church, together with union of the individual soul with Christ follows similar pattern². Here, he merely continues to develop the theme for the church as the redeemed people of God growing in perfection. We therefore expect that Gregory will put emphasis on the work of Christ in his ecclesiology. Indeed in Homily seven, Gregory chooses his Canticle text carefully, in order to begin and end with Christ, the Architect, the Builder and the Goal of the Church (Canticle 3:9 and 4:6,7).

3.1.2 Christ, the Builder of the Spiritual Church

Gregory begins then, by identifying Christ as the true Solomon, the true wisdom who makes himself a litter, the Church, the throne of God on which he sits[J207.9]. Just as the earthly Solomon built the temple so Christ builds his spiritual Church. The typological symbolism is not unique to Gregory, because of the obvious link between Solomon the Wise and the Wisdom of the Word that comes from God³. Thus Solomon is a type of the prince of peace, who was nailed on the Cross yet reconciling the entire world to himself [J201.9-12]. This Christ is also the builder of the temple, the people of God, who laid its foundations on the prophets and apostles [J202], a dwelling of God in the Spirit. Solomon's wisdom was but a derived wisdom from Christ whose essence is truth and wisdom and power, for he created all things through wisdom [J203.4]. Solomon's wisdom was recognised so far and wide that the Queen of Ethiopia came to visit him

[J201.7, I King 10:1-3]. The journey of the Ethiopian Queen typifies the journey of the Gentile believers into the Church⁴.

3.1.3 The Church, From Darkness to Light

From here Gregory launches into a history of the Church as paralleling the journey of the ascending soul. "At the beginning, the assembly was dark from idolatry before it became the Church...", states Gregory [J205.6-9], "It lived far from Knowledge of the true God and was separated by a great gulf of ignorance."⁵ Mankind was divided into two groups, Israel and the Gentiles. With Christ's true light shining on all man, the intervening wall is broken down, the unity of God's people is re-established in Christ himself. Jews and Gentiles becomes one in him. But as history would have it, the Incarnation, the shining of the true light in the world, was too astounding for Israel, she "closed her eyes to the light and refused any participation in the good", but the fate of the Gentile/Ethiopians is different, they:

"hastened to the faith from among the nations, and those far off drew near, having washed off their darkness by the mystical washing. They were led to God and offered gifts to the King: the spices of piety, the gold of the knowledge of god, the precious stones of the commandments and works of virtue." [J205.16-20]

3.1.4 Saints as Construction Materials for the Church

The result is such that those who respond to the light of the Incarnation become the materials with which the true temple/litter of God is built. Gregory again uses the construction of the litter as a symbol to describe the formation and the variety of gifts and functions that can be observed in the Church. God is present in the saints according to each one's capacity and worthiness, but this is not a course for contention amongst the saints. Indeed, every part of the litter will have to be perfectly fitted together, each playing its own part, in order that it can be worthy of the Person that it is carrying. The various materials used in construction of the litter, Gregory takes to mean the gifts of the Spirit manifested in the Church as described by St. Paul in I Corinthians.

First there must be a total transformation of sinners to saints. Gregory takes the Cantic text "made ... of the woods of Lebanon. He made its pillars silver, its back gold ..." (Canticle 3:9-10) to mean a total transformation of wood, which is judged to be worthless for constructing a house (cf. I Cor. 3:12), a symbol of disobedience and sin, to gold and silver, the imperishable building materials, hinting through these things at the incorporeal, spiritual creation:

"Thus, at one time, we were all these trees of Lebanon while rooted in them by an evil life and the deception of idolatry. But since we were cut off by a spiritual axe and were in the artisan's hands, God made us into a litter. He transformed our wood by a rebirth into silver, gold, rich purple, and gleaming stones." [J 209.13-20]

The transformation means that each member is now fit to be the construction material for the House of God, each exercising his own gifts,

different yet harmonious. It is interesting that there are variations to St. Paul's list in I Corinthians. Pure teaching is emphasised, together with a pure conscience, is to adorn the most important part of the litter, the head rest of the king. To these are added specifically "priests, teachers, and the venerable state of virginity gleaming with the rays of stones inside the litter by the purity of virtues." [J211.15-18]⁶

3.1.5 The Bride as Example for the Church

The achievement of the Bride is not taken as pride, but as an experience that should be passed on to like-minded souls who dares attempt the journey of ascent. Therefore, the call of the Bride is naturally, to "go beyond the veil of human nature and see this marvelous sight." [J212.9] The sight is the Bridegroom adorned with his crown, the Church, his own dwelling crowned with the virtues of distinguished members.

Socially and ecclesiastically, the Bride imitates her Lord in his love for mankind and his wish that all men would be saved and come to the recognition of the truth. Her compassion derives its strength from the loving God, she has become a companion of the Lord's goodness since she drew near to God through Love. [J215] The fact that the Bride does not seize the opportunity to present herself but beseeches the seekers to behold the "marvelous sight" of the Church speaks clearly of the unique relationship of the individual soul in ascent and the Church. The Bride recognises her part in the communion of saints, thus avoiding idiosyncratic and

individualistic idea of the soul in flight⁷, "from the alone to the Alone." This also points to the fact that Gregory places great importance on the role of the Church in the divinisation of the soul. The marvelous sight is that members of the Universal Church work and function together harmoniously for the common good. Far from curbing the progress of the soul, the Church is indispensable in fostering a fellowship and communion, a teaching ground for the soul in its path.

3.1.6 The Church as the Beautified Body of Christ

Thus Gregory launches into the description of the Church as a beautified body of Christ, cleansed from impurity and able to fulfill the function of the representative of Christ. The anatomy of the body and the way it is described all contribute to the interpretation of this function.

i. The Eyes as Watchful Instructors

As is expected the Church facing rampant heretical attack, the eyes of the Church standing above the rest of the anatomy and having an honourable position signifies discernment⁸ and also serve as "instructors and teachers for every purpose and are congenial, indispensable guide for a safe journey through life." [J217.1-3] Those who are entrusted with this function must be watchful and serve to lead and guide others in the path

of light from the work of darkness. The eyes are described "as doves apart from being silent" (Canticle 4:1) because of its purity and ability to reflect the Holy Spirit's grace. The curious way of describing the eyes as "apart from being silent", Gregory takes to mean "the person who looks to the uncreated and gazes into what is hidden testifies that silence is more praiseworthy than anything external." [J219.14-16] The implication to the ascetic life of silent contemplation is obvious here.

ii. The Hair as Ascetic Way of Life

Quoting St. Paul, Gregory sees the hair as the glory of a woman's head. Thus the hair has all the wonderful quality of a chaste woman: respect and modesty pertaining to reverence to God. [J220] And the hair is "completely devoid of a living sensation" [J221.3], that is, it is dead to sense perception, implying that when described as the hair, the Church has forsaken worldly values, like glory and honour, nor is she saddened by injury or disgrace, she is unmoved by things of this world in any circumstance. [J221.14-21] The ascetic detachment to worldly values means a cultivation of true apathetic essence. The Church retreats from vain-glory to pursue things lasting and incompatible, leading a life of chastity, modesty, abstinence and bodily mortification. [J222.11-13] Elijah is invoked as a prime example of the contemplative life, led by suggestions from the Canticle text, "Your hair is as flocks of goats which has appeared from Galaad" (Canticle 4:1). Elijah practiced the ascetical life for a long time on

Mount Galaad⁹, leading a life of abstinence and wearing a thick cloak of goat hair. Thus persons pledging to follow this way of life are adornment of the Church and thus should be encouraged.

iii. The Mouth and the Lips as Skillful Teachers

Next, Gregory engages Plato's help in emphatically exerting his point again and again that teachings are food for the soul¹⁰, that comprehension comes from teaching: "Just as material food is reduced into small pieces [by the teeth] for our stomach, there is a certain capacity in the soul which reduces teachings into small pieces, enabling it to comprehend them." [J224.3-6] And we need perceptive teachers in the Church in order to learn and grow in our spiritual journey. It is the duty of gifted teachers to reduce "the divine mysteries into small fragments for a clearer interpretation of the text [and] make spiritual food more easily acceptable for the body of the Church." [J225.21-23] These divine mysteries are embedded in the literary text, it requires subtle contemplation to clarify and break them into delectable doctrines and teachings. And of course, allegorical interpretation of the text demands exactly such discerning teacher. The quality of the teachers are emphasised. They should be cleansed "from every defilement both of body and of spirit, they constantly rise by progressing and never slip back into the depths from which they came." [J227.13-16] Virtue and good actions are a must. [J227.17 - J228.3]

Only by strictly disciplined teaching can the Church bear fruits and

able to share the mystery of the Gospel, for it is by the teachings (= the teeth) that the Church's mouth speaks (= the lips). [J228] The strange description of the text "Your lips are like a thread of scarlet" (Cant.4:3), Gregory takes to mean that the Church is to speak with one voice and one mind (= *one* thread of scarlet instead of two) in harmony with the good, one cord formed from different threads, a unity in diversity. The colour scarlet affords Gregory to incorporate the confession (as through the mouth) of the doctrine which the Church holds dear¹¹:

"The scarlet colour reminds us to be attentive to the blood by which we are delivered and to always have a confession on our mouths by the blood which redeems us. The comeliness of lips fills out those of the Church when the faith of our confession shines forth and when love is entwined with faith." [J229.1-5]

iv. The Cheeks as Temperance Protecting Inner Beauty

The cheek is compared to the skin of a pomegranate, apart from being silent (Canticle 4:3). Because the skin of a pomegranate is not much to look at, it must symbolise a praise of temperance, but shines with inner beauty. The skin is a protective layer that guards the fruit inside, thus "the exercise of temperance rightly partakes of contemplation" for "a harsh, austere life of self-control [is] a guardian for the benefits of temperance" [J230.10-14] Two things are emphasised here concerning the conduct of the Church: "The external appearances of a well-ordered life and correct actions of a soul free from passion." [J230.18-19]

v. The Neck as Channel for the Work of the Holy Spirit

Next, the neck is described as "the tower of David that was built for an armory; a thousand shields hang upon it, and all the spears of mighty men." (Canticle 4:4) That the neck is described as a tower is understandable in terms of its shape. The neck contains the vertebrae, the wind pipe and the voice box. It also contains a passage for food in the throat, and thus is pregnant with spiritual meaning. First, the neck bears the weight of the head a privileged position as it symbolises bearing the head of the Church, so all will desire to be called a neck. [J234.17-20] Gregory puts the functions of the neck succinctly, it is worth quoting his words in full:

"Let a person imitate the harmonious setting of vertebrae which taken singularly are persons joined in a bond of peace to form one member which binds and keeps itself erect, and can easily move from side to side. Paul was such a neck. If anyone follows the example of Paul, a chosen vessel for the Lord, bearer of the Lord's name, and whose head has brought all the limbs fully into harmony, whatever this person speaks, it is no longer him but the head, Christ, speaking and talking as Paul showed the Corinthians [2Cor 13.3]. Thus the windpipe articulates the word of truth with a sweet and pleasant sound from the Holy Spirit. The upper part of the throat always sweetens the windpipe with divine works and nourishes the entire body by these life-giving teachings. The vertebrae, effect harmony in the body by the bond of peace and love. Who then teaches the neck to bend down in humility, turn all around, raise itself up again to perceive those things on high, look sideways, and to gracefully turn away and beware of the devil's various deceits?" [J235.8 - J236.10]

Thus the neck is a self-denial organ that is a channel through which the Lord speaks, of which the whole body depends to stay erect against opposition, from which the sweet exhortation of the Holy Spirit is uttered. It is also an instrument to bend down in humility and turn away from deceit and evil. By comparing the neck to a tower, whereas previously the

Bride/Church was compared to chains and necklaces, it shows the further advancement of the greatness of the Bride's perfection.

3.1.7 The Indwelling Holy Spirit

No ecclesiology is complete without reference to the Holy Spirit. Gregory sees in the text, "Until the day breathes and the shadows depart", (Canticle 4:6) as the reference to the Holy Spirit whom the Church relies on to survive (to breath). Earlier, in his description of the neck, he refers to the wind pipe saying that "it is a receptacle for the outside breath to be inhaled by which the heart's fire is fanned" [J234.1-2], the outside breath is of course the Holy Spirit. And here the Spirit not only warms the heart, but drives away the shadow of vanity as he shines into heart like the sun into darkened corners, dispensing darkness and illumines those who know him [J239 - J240]. The souls thus illumined are "like fawns of the antelope" well-fed by the nourishment which is incorruptible. And like breasts that produce milk, they "do not shut grace up in itself but gives the teat of the Word to those in need, thereby providing nourishing food for its children [J242.10-13]. Thus the Church does not exist unto itself but as it is filled with grace, it shares its gifts and teaching with the rest of the world.

3.1.8 The Church as Participating in the Life of Christ

Gregory then rounds out his exposition of the Church, the bride of

Christ. The Church begins and works her way towards the goal who is Christ himself. Gregory sees this as the Church's participation in the divinity through her participation in the death and resurrection of the Incarnate Christ. "Human nature cannot be purged from the stain (of sin) unless the Lamb who takes the sin of the world destroys evil" [J243.10-13]. And only Christ has the power to lay down his life and take it up again¹². "I will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense" (Cant.4:6). After the myrrh of death is the frankincense of divinity. As for the soul and the Church, this is the greatest news:

"He who partakes of myrrh with Christ will indeed partake of frankincense, for he who suffers with him will be glorified with him. Once in the divine glory, he will be completely beautiful, far removed from any offensive blemish. By Christ and through Christ, we have been separated (from sin). He died and rose for us, to whom be glory and power forever and ever. Amen." [J243.15 - J244.2]

3.2 HOMILY EIGHT: EVEN THE ANGELS MARVEL AT THE SIGHT

3.2.1 A Restatement of the Concept of Eternal Progress

As is now familiar to the pattern of Gregory's exegesis, the call of the Bridegroom to the Bride to action, be it simply "come" or "come yourself", is an occasion to expound on the progress of the Bride in her spiritual journey. If the goal is but a straight forward travel from beginning to end, according to Gregory, the text of the Canticle would not have repeat the call to approach¹³ It is surely an indication of the pattern with which the

Bride/soul will follow in her search for the ultimate goal of perfection and divinisation. Thus the doctrine of Epektasis is especially apparent in the Cantic text, "I consider myself not to have reached [the goal], but I stretch forward to what lies in front of me, forgetting what went before me." [J245.15-17, Phil.3:13] Even Paul, when he had seen the lofty vision of the third heaven and heard the unutterable mysteries of paradise, did not stop at this privilege, but having had his appetite whetted for even loftier things, he continued to seek the higher good¹⁴. Paul teaches us that "the blessed nature of the good is eternally much better than what we have received while what lies beyond our comprehension is always boundless." [J245.22 - J246.1] The person rising never stands still, the attainment of knowledge and virtue at any single stage will result in both a satisfaction and gratitude for having^{been} able to attain to that stage and also trigger the person to seek more satisfaction because part of the knowledge attained at any particular stage is the knowledge of inadequacy in comprehending the divine. It is as if Christ, the Fountain of Grace, sets no limit on our thirst. There is a continuous flow of grace to quench the continuous thirst, but this is not a static motion of thirsting and quenching but an ascent, a thirst for perfection and divinisation, actually increase with the deeper participation in it¹⁵.

3.2.2 The Resurrected Life

Throughout, Gregory reminds his audience that this ascent can never

be accomplished without the work of Christ being acknowledged as the source of all ascents of the saints. The Bride must indeed go first to the mountain of myrrh and go up the hill of frankincense (Canticle 4:6), or in an extended exposition of Romans 6:4, "You were buried with [Christ] through baptism into death ... You have risen with me and ascended to the fellowship of my divinity signified by the term 'frankincense'" [J249.13-16]. But frankincense is "the beginning of faith which you have shared by the resurrection" [J250.2-3], a clause which is not explored here, by is taken up in other passages¹⁶. But the meaning is becoming clear. The rising with Christ is for eternity as resurrection is to eternity. By the act of faith, the soul has passed from death to resurrected life, but it is only the beginning of progress to loftier goods, a life of progressive sanctification or divinisation, as Gregory puts it "the beginning of our transformation to what is divine" (...ἀρχή γέγονεν ἡμῖν τῆς πρὸς τὸ θεῖον μεταπολίσεως) [J250.14-15] "You will go and pass on" [Cant.4:8]; that is, you will arrive while not ceasing to continually pass on by continuing to rise." [J250.6-7]

3.2.3 From Changeability to Apatheia

Two things the Bridegroom does to ensure that the Bride is on the right path and to exhort her to further goods: he has manifested his own beauty to her and no longer called her betrothed, but the true bride, i.e. the Groom effects a change in status of the Bride by revealing himself so that he becomes not only the pattern to follow but the goal for the Bride¹⁷. And

"he reminds her of her horrible, beastly forms in order that she may delight in her presence enjoyment, by comparing them with her former state [of defilement]" (J252.3-5). The fact that the Bride can be transformed comes through, of all things, the changeability of her human nature, in other words, our mutability can become "an ally in our ascent towards higher things, and by the changeability of our nature we are to establish it immovably in the good." [J252.15-17] This is achieved by turning from evil, as the nature is changed into something divine, it slowly sheds its tendency toward the temptation of mutable things to a state free from passion.

3.2.4 The Church Redeemed Through the Incarnation

Gregory then relates the ascending soul to the role of the Church in his curious interpretation of the Canticle text "Our sister, our spouse, you have given us heart..." (Canticle4:9). God has effected something totally new in the Church. Whereas "the principalities and the transcendent powers" knew only God's work in which his character is manifested, God's beauty effect the Created beauty, in the establishment of the Church, God has effected a union of opposites: "life through death, justification through sin, blessing through a curse, glory through disgrace and strength through weakness" [J255.7-9], but best of all, through the Incarnation, we see the manifold wisdom of God manifested definitively through the Church:

"The Word becomes flesh, life is mixed with death, by his own bruises he heals our wound, brings down the adversary's power by the weakness of the cross, the invisible is manifested in the flesh, Christ redeems captives He himself is the one

who purchases and has become the price itself (for he gave himself as a ransom for us into death). Christ is in death, and life does not depart from him, and he becomes a slave yet remains a king." [J255.19 - J256.5]

3.2.5 A Completely New Manifestation

The saints in the Church are able to reveal the profoundest of the divine mysteries even to the angels. This completely new manifestation is the sign of how deeply God is willing to commit himself in order for mankind to achieve divinisation. The true beauty of God is imparted on the image of the Church as he has done in the mirror of the soul in order to reflect the glory of God, so much so that Gregory dares to venture boldly to say that "by contemplating the bridegroom's beauty in his spouse, [the angels] are marvelling at his invisible, incomprehensible presence in all creatures." [256.10-12] Therefore, the angels are "given us hearts" (Cantic 4:9), because the revelation of this mystery is something completely new, like persons "looking into the Church's face as if it were a clean mirror [and] see the sun of Righteousness who is comprehended by that which is visible. This mystical interpretation of the Church, the body of Christ is also something new in Gregory's homilies of the Song¹⁸. It parallels his idea of the soul as the mirror, the image of God and also the importance of the role of the Church as instrument⁶ for the manifestation of God's glory.

3.2.6 Purity of Vision

Further praise is given to the Bride because she has used "one of your eyes" (Canticle 4:9), the purified eye that see the Bridegroom alone, he,

"who is comprehended in his immutable and eternal nature, the true Father, the only-begotten son and the Holy Spirit, [Who is] truly alone, contemplated in one nature, with no separation or division according to the different person."
[J258.2-5]

This outburst of doxological doctrine seems to have no firm justification, save for the fact that while Gregory describes the beauty of the Church, it must be the beauty of her purity in doctrine, her concentrated focus on the one true God, unlike the heretics who "divide the One Nature into many disparate natures by appearances arising from their own distorted vision." [J258.8-9]¹⁹ In seeing much, they actually see nothing.

The purity of one's vision is also the characteristic of the soul which has its uniformity in a virtuous life. It is then able to bear the yoke of Christ upon its neck, which is not burdensome but a great adornment of beauty as is described in Homily Three²⁰. The conscious parallel of the ascent of the soul in perfection and the beautification of the Church is apparent, and to Gregory the Church's acquired beauty is but a cumulative acquisition of the virtue and glory in the individual souls.

3.3 HOMILY NINE: TO BE LIKE THE ARCHETYPE

3.3.1 Further Warning of How Not to Interpret Literally

As the Song becomes more explicit in its description of the Bridegroom's praise of the Bride's physical beauty, Gregory deems it once again important to remind his reader/audience of not taking the text literally as such, he cautions them of the danger of corrupting the mind if the literary description becomes a perverse attraction in the sacred text²¹. "The person dead to both passion and desire transfers the outward meaning of the Song's words to that which is pure and undefiled" [J262.14-16]. Nevertheless, the literal text is important in linking the spiritual ideas into a coherent system. Here Gregory ingeniously discovers a link of the literal text which develops into a profound spiritual treatise on the mutual love of the Bride/soul/Church and her Lord.

3.3.2 Praise for the Groom Becomes the Praise for the Bride

The reader would remember that Canticle text, "Your breasts are better than wine, and the scent of your ointments is better than all spices" (ὅτι ἀγαθοὶ μαστοὶ σου ὑπὲρ οἶνον, καὶ ὁσμη μύρων σου ὑπὲρ πάντα τὰ ἄρώματα) was used to describe the beauty of the Bridegroom (Canticle 1:2-3). There the Bridegroom was praised for producing wine for the benefit of the ascending soul and the fragrance is live-giving force to the soul which inhale its scent. Here in Homily Nine we see the exact same imageries (τί

ἐκαλλιώθησαν μαστοί σου ἀπὸ οἴνου; καὶ ὁσμὴ ^{ἱματίων} ~~μαρῶν~~ σου ὑπὲρ πάντα τὰ ἄρώματα) (Canticle 4:10) are used, this time, on the person of the Bride. This is remarkable and yet not surprising²². Gregory quotes Plato's Protagoras²³, a famous dictum that says, "God is always present to us inasmuch as we freely present ourselves before him" [J264.16-18] but always careful to add the Biblical text in support of the pagan notion (quoting Psalm 117:1-4; Matthew 25:34-46). This works to his advantage in explaining the near identical description of the Bridegroom and the perfecting soul in Christ. The affinity of the seeker and the sought-after merges, there is a union and this union brought about the interchange of beatitudes and characters, as the soul draws ever closer to God, so much so that the Bridegroom uses the same praise reserved only for himself to elevate the status of the Bride.

But the elevation of the status of the Bride does not result in pride, instead an attitude of sacrifice and worshipful offering. Gregory interprets the imagery "And the scent of your ointments is better than all spices" in a radically different way from that for the Bridegroom²⁴. On the Bride, the imagery becomes sacramental, a sacrifice which produces a good scent that is pleasing unto God (quoting Genesis 8:21, see J266.11-12). The sweet smelling of the sacrificial fragrance has double meaning. Firstly, it is the sweet smelling of the Gospel that transcends every scent of the Law, i.e., its meaning is no longer hidden in symbolism in their superficial and literal sense, harping back to his justification of allegory for the sake of the clarity of life-giving message of the Gospel. Secondly, because of the superiority of

the spiritual/allegorical message, it implies that the sacrifice of the human passions, a contrite and humble heart before God is far superior to the efficacy of animal sacrifices prior to the Gospel. In other words,

"The soul spiritually inhales a good fragrance like Paul, a 'good odour of Christ' and transcends every symbolic fragrance of the Law. The soul becomes fragrant in her life, breathing the myrrh of priesthood and the incense of conscience composed from different virtues; her life is a sweet smelling odour to the bridegroom" [J268.5-11].

Thus the life of perfecting soul is a sacramental life, no longer does it inhale and exhale fragrance unto itself, it is, a receptacle of God's fragrance which in turns becomes the instrument for leading others to God by leaving in its trail the sweet smell of Christ for others who care to follow in the path, for those who are perfect and those who are still infants²⁵.

3.3.3 The Gathering of Wisdom

The Bride, like bees, gathers up all the wisdom that can be found in the field of divinely inspired words, stores up this wisdom, a noble task that exchanges the labour of learning for the blessings of eternity. Again Gregory stresses the importance of scripture²⁶ and the diligent study that it requires in order to be a storehouse of wisdom so that other can tap into the resources and be blessed. "For the person who must speak had this manifold power of the word under his tongue; it is ready for each listener at the right time" [J271.4-6].

3.3.4 The New Garment Smelling of Frankincense

There is even greater praise installed for the Bride as "the scent of your garments is as the smell of frankincense" (Cant.4:11). The mention of garments immediately brings to mind the garment of skin of the first Adam, the symbol of corruptible earthly existence²⁷. Because of her salvation and her practice in leading a virtuous life, the Bride's old garment of skin is now exchanged for the new garment of incorruptible life of heaven. The Cantic text mentions that this garment has the smell of frankincense, the subtlety of which does not escape Gregory's scrutiny. It is not frankincense itself but the garments that exude forth the smell of frankincense, meaning that, "The garment of your virtues, my bride, *imitates* the divine blessedness and *resembles* the transcendent divine nature by your purity and freedom from passion" [J272.17-19]. Since Scripture testifies that Christ is clothed with frankincense²⁸, the exacted soul is deemed worthy to participate in this divinity. [J280.10-12] The new garment is interwoven with the fruit of the Spirit as described in Galatians.

3.3.5 The Ascent of the Soul benefits the World

It would be clear by now what Gregory is driving at. The life of spiritual ascent is not a seeker in isolation nor is it a pursuit of mystical ecstasy that has no earthly use. Every aspect of the ascent is not only a preparation, a starting point for further ascent, but more importantly, as

the union with God becomes more imminent, the soul not only shines for the beauty of virtue but also reflects the glory of God in its very inner core, this leads the soul to have compassion for others as God has compassion for the world. So every step of ascent shows even more positive the benefit the soul can bring to the world around him. A life of virtue leads to a life of compassionate actions.

3.3.6 A Garden Enclosed From Evil

Nevertheless, obedience to the commandments of God is the sure safeguard to virtuous living. According to Gregory's interpretation, he takes the text seriously in its literary description of "a garden enclosed"²⁹ (Cant.4:12) The garden yields abundant blossoms if tended with care, so too is the garden of the soul, if allowed to mature, will yield fruits that "sweeten the senses of the soul ... soothes pain and relaxes suffering" etc. [J274] An enclosed blossoming garden is one fortified with the commandments of God, and if provided with an everflowing fountain for irrigation, it must be "sealed" (Canticle 4:12) to evil thoughts, and only nourish the cultivation of purity and tranquility. [J276 and J277] Therefore, the Bride is advised not to entertain thoughts that "pertains to the body ... We have learned that virtues are God's plants which occupy our soul's intellectual faculty; by not flowing out, it will not be sealed by the stamp of truth and formed with a disposition towards the good" [J277.5 and 7-11]³⁰.

3.3.7 A Garden of Pomegranates is The Beautified Soul

Not being content with achieving this stage of ascent, the Bride breaks new ground when she is described as "a garden of pomegranates" (Canticle 4:13). Gregory then collapses the rest of the imageries in Canticle 4:13 to 15 into this garden of delight. Although exegetically impossible, Gregory sees this fantastic exegetical task as necessary in order to justify the Song's use of all these disparate imageries and discover the coherence of the text³¹. Here the fruit of the pomegranates is a kind of botanical hybrid that peels off like layers of onion revealing in turn the beauty of the bride in her ascent.

i. The shoot as Having the Apostolic Mission

"Your shoots are a garden of pomegranates" (Canticle 4:13). Here Gregory takes pain in explaining the word, shoots (= αἱ ἀπόστολοι) which means, "send forth" or "issue forth". To him, it has immediate link with the Apostles. Thus the experience of the Bride is issued forth, like the Apostles, so that those who hear this word of faith can receive it can also "become a garden planted in their hearts" [J282.4-7]

ii. The Rind of the Pomegranate as the Ascetic Life

The rind of the pomegranate is bitter and harsh to taste, and the

branch on which it grows is thorny. This makes for natural protection of the honey sweet fruit inside. Speaking spiritually, it implies a toughness in the ascetic life, a life toughened by continence and self-control, that will ward off any evil intent to bespoil the sweet fruit of virtue. [J282 - J283]³²

iii. Cypress with Nard as Purity with Zeal

Next is the issue of various kinds of perfumes. Cypress is wonderfully mixed with nard. One is distinctive for its warmth and the other its fragrance, when mixed will yield the spiritual meaning thus: 'Purity must assist warmth by testifying that we are on fire with the Spirit and are cleansed from every displeasing kind of warmth.' [J282.14-17]

iv. Saffron as Moderation

The symbol of saffron is taken from its property which avoids extreme cold or heat, thus represents power of moderation, the avoidance of excess or defect in virtue³³. Or according to Gregory's more elaborate explanation of the anatomy of the plant/flower, it also represents the ability to choose between contrived error and sound teaching. [J285]

v. Cinnamon as Reason

Cinnamon, according to plant lore, has the ability to cool anything

that comes in contact with it. Spiritually speaking, if cinnamon is present in the soul, the person who "teems with desire or burns with rage, uses reason to quench the passions", as a result, "reason purifies the dream-like fantasy and confusion of this present life" [J287 - J288]

vi. Frankincense of the Woods of Lebanon as Divinisation

There is a direct contradiction of interpreting "the woods of Lebanon" in Homily Seven, where it represents evil life and the deception of idolatry [J209]³⁴, but here it seems that there is a positive aspect to the imagery: frankincense flows from a certain species of the woods of Lebanon. So in this positive appraisal of the Bride's beauty, evil and idolatry has no place, but the mention of frankincense saves the day. Frankincense consistently represents the divinity. Therefore, "the person showing the divinity in any of life's circumstances manifests the beauty of the woods of Lebanon which represent the divine image" [J290.3-5].

vii. A Catalogue of Spices as the virtuous Life

The other catalogue of spices pertains to the virtuous life as well. The mention of myrrh and aloes brings to mind death and burial, thus "no one can share God's glory unless he has been first conformed to the likeness of Christ death," [J290.6-7], a reiteration of an exertion in Homily Eight³⁵. "Chief spices show us purity and a life free from any thoughtless, reckless

behaviour "through" unadulterated, pure doctrine" [J290.15-16 and J291.11].

3.3.8 The Bride Becomes a Well of Living Water

Having interpreted the catalogue of virtuous life, Gregory returns to his theme of overflowing fountain of living water, meaning by it in two ways. The Bride is now described as "a well of living water springing from Lebanon" because she is compared to beauty's Archetype, partakers of God by possessing the well of living water in her. She has reached such height in her spiritual ascent that she becomes the well in which the source of living water flows in the salvation of mankind. [J292 - J924] Thus the evangelical task of the soul coincides with that of the Church, the bride of Christ.

3.4 HOMILY TEN: SOBER INEBRIATION AND WATCHFUL SLEEP

Gregory never lets off his grip on the central theme of Christ's presence and transformation of the human person once the human soul professes its affinity towards its Creator³⁶. In Homily nine, he states emphatically that "no one can share God's glory unless he has been first conformed to the likeness of Christ's death" [J290.6-7]. The divinisation of the human person begins with this conformation, the power and incentive for spiritual ascent thus comes from the indwelling Christ, changing human

nature "from glory to glory". No longer does the soul look into God's glory from afar as one gazing at the distant star's brilliance, but it is allowed to draw near this glory, "from considering divine things which illumine our souls by heavenly, spiritual utterances" [J295.16-17].

3.4.1 The Soul Commands the Body

The permission to draw near implies also the gift of authority, not even by the prayer of the soul, but by him who allows the soul to draw near. So it is with the authority of the church, a communion of saints.

It turns out that this authority is the power to drive out evil and replace it with good. Just as the Centurion in the Gospel narrative, who surpasses Israel's faith, who commends with authority his servant to depart, so too the soul can take control of the body, its servant, and the body "will readily take orders from its master who applies virtue which is applied to the body's service." [J298.17-19]³⁷

3.4.2 The Wind of the Spirit

From the knowledge of ancient meteorological speculation, Gregory obtains his flow of interpretation of the Canticle text "Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind" (Canticle 4:16). It is reasonable to take the Mediterranean geographical point of view and assumes that the north wind brings cold weather, and if this is compared with winter, it would mean a

climate of extremity that is unsettling and uncomfortable. The harshness of the climate reminds one of the hardness that is life without virtue, without God, and "the lovely characteristics which blossoms according to virtue are extinguished" [J301.5-6].

Right does the Bride exert her authority to drive out the evil north wind from the soul and call upon the hot, bright midday south wind to replace it. This is the nourishing wind which fosters growth and "blows through my garden and let my spices flow out" (Canticle 4:16). This south wind is immediately identify with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to the disciples³⁸, for there too, the phenomenon is described as the flow of a strong wind

"This wind makes the garden of God produce spices, give forth fragrant prophecies and salvific precepts about the faith by the Apostles' mouths and freely pour out the good fragrance of their teaching in every language." [J301.13-17]

The ease with which Gregory changes the identity of the Bride, from the individual soul to the Church, attested to his refusal to view the ascent as purely individualistic. But seeing it another way, the passage also indicates that it is precisely the prayer and authority of the individual soul that empowers the Church for maturity and God-likeness³⁹.

3.4.3 Grace and Free Will

The doctrine of evil is such that since evil is the absence of good⁴⁰, once good replaces evil, "the prudence of the flesh can no longer resist the

Spirit (having been mortified, the flesh cannot be in opposition)" [J298.5-7], it is made to be subservient in obedience to the Spirit's rule. So concerning the matter of grace and its relation to human free will, this abundantly shows that synergism is implied here. The willingness of human free will to pursue virtue is subservience to the spirit's rule, which replaces evil with good⁴¹.

This theme of grace and free will is again expound in the text "Blow through my garden" (Canticle 4:16). The breath of the Spirit beckons to the Bride's prompting, a willing heart to see growth in the spiritual life is honoured by the Spirit who fosters its growth. The active part of the Bride's prompting is stressed as much as the Spirit's power to let the fragrance of the spices flow out. The spices here refer to the fragrance that is derived from Christ and becomes enshrined in the soul so that it is as if the fragrance of Christ comes directly from the soul as the Spirit blows it abroad. [J302]

3.4.4 The Soul Now Capable of Bearing Its Own Fruit

The Bride prepares a feast for her guest of honour and call upon the Bridegroom, "Let my beloved come down into his garden and eat the fruit of his choice berries." (Canticle 4:6) As Gregory sees it, this is a bold statement because it is invoking him from, by and in whom all things exist to visit his creation. There are two aspects to this invitation as Gregory perceives it: the pastness of the necessity of the Incarnation when the bread

of heaven came to give life to the world and the existential anticipation of all those who await salvation in virtuous living. The promise of salvation is assured by the Incarnation because of the bounteous love of God for mankind: "we cannot otherwise be lifted up to the Most High unless the Lord inclines to the humble and exalts the meek" [J304.17-19, Psa. 146:6]. But the curious thing about it is that it is the Bride that prepares the feast⁴². Gregory's explanation is this:

"The table is a garden planted with living trees. We indeed are the trees, and the food offered to him is our soul's salvation ... The fruit is our free will which gives God our souls to pluck, as it were, on a small branch." [J303.15-17 and J304.4-5]

We can only postulate that what Gregory means here is that all those who have obtained salvation await the indwelling of the Lord of salvation, while preparing themselves in conscious anticipation by growing and bearing fruit. The fruit here is the free will that is submitted to the Lord in obedience, no longer being tossed about by evil intent. Thus the Bride first enjoys the sweet fruit of the apple (e.g. Canticle 2:3) of the Incarnation, then "she herself becomes the lovely, sweet fruit offered to the husbandman for his enjoyment" [J304.8-9]. Thus, the soul is not just a receptacle of God's grace, but in this case, it is also capable, by the deeper communion with the indwelling Christ, bear its own fruit that is presented to the Lord⁴³.

3.4.5 The Eucharist as Divinising Act

The Bridegroom's response to this invitation to indwell is both swift

and exceeds his spouse's request. [J305] He not only tastes the fruits of virtue that are presented to him, but he changes the fruits into something better and more worthy. According to Gregory then, when the Bride invited the Groom to come to her garden, she offered the fruit of virtue, but Canticle 5:1 seems to change the imagery of fruits into bread and wine: "In place of choice berries the bridegroom makes trees produce bread mixed with his honey... and the wine drawn from the tree is mixed with his milk". [J306.3-7]

i. Mutual Satisfaction

The allusion to bread and wine immediately carries the connotation of the Eucharistic rite. But first Gregory needs to explain why the text says of the Bridegroom's satisfaction in coming to the garden of the Bride:

"I have come into my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spices; I have eaten my bread with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk" (Canticle 5:1).

Clearly this cannot have referred to the Eucharist where the bread and wine are distributed to the body of Christ instead of being consumed by the Lord himself. But Gregory sees a connection between these two ideas with the last stanza of Canticle 5:1, "Eat my companions, drink, and be inebriated, my brethren".

The coming into the garden of the Bridegroom must be taken to mean the life-transforming indwelling of Christ in the believers, for even the fruit of virtue that the Bride has carefully and painstakingly cultivate is totally transformed into something greater. "In place of choice berries the

bridegroom makes trees producing bread mixed with his honey ... and the wine drawn from the trees is mixed with his milk"[306.3-7]. But first the fragrance of the Bride's fruit is combined with myrrh and other spices. This is an oft-repeated exertion by Gregory of the necessity of mortifying our earthly members⁴⁴ [J306.14-15]. The miracle of the transformation to bread and wine of the fruit is not adequately explained by Gregory. We are left with postulation of what he means. It is made doubly difficult by Gregory's quotation of Matt 25:35, "I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink" [J307.6-8], whereas he emphatically quotes St. Paul, "from him and through him and in him are all things" [Rom 11:36, J306.7-8, J303.9]. If the Lord lacks nothing, then why is there mention of hunger and thirst especially in this context? Perhaps the clue lies with a parenthesis, "The bread of gladness is a delight sweetened by the honey of the command"⁴⁵ [J307.16-17]. It seems to indicate a double satisfaction of both the giver and the receiver. They are both intertwined. The giver of the feast, the Bride, is also the receiver of transformation into something more worthy, the receiver of the feast, the Groom, not only gives "more perfect nourishment" but also takes delight in issuing the "command" that is willingly obeyed by the Bride. The hunger and thirst is thus a metaphor for "the longing of Christ to see purity (= milk) and obedience in the believer. Gregory uses St. Paul as the prime example, who offered up his life for the Lord:

"St. Paul was a myrrh-bearing tree who was daily put to death and who put himself under death's sentence; being fragrant through purity and detachment he became a scent of life to those who are saved. Paul ground into wheat the living plants

of the garden for the Lord." [J307.9-14]

ii. Sober Inebriation

The mutual satisfaction of the giver and the receiver is extended to include the Church as well, as the text exhorts, "eat, my companions and drink, be inebriated, my brethren" (Canticle 5:1). Most scholars, when examining Gregory's interpretation of the text⁴⁶ [J308-311] ignores the Eucharistic context which Gregory calls to bear, but the evidence is strong, as Gregory quotes and compare this text with Matthew 26:26-27, "eat and drink" and Pauline text in I Corinthians 11:29 of receiving the Eucharist unworthily.

True, Gregory's interpretation concerns ecstasy and sober inebriation. Gregory cites the experiences of David, Paul and Peter to substantiate his argument. David's example already appears in *De Virginitate*⁴⁷, where it is used not as an example of how man can experience ecstasy but to show the transcendent incomprehensibility of God by the human senses, so much so that when David was transported out of himself by the Spirit, to contemplate the immaterial and spiritual realm, he cried out, "Every man is a liar" (Psa. 115.11) which Gregory takes to mean that "anyone who attempts to portray that ineffable Light in language is truly a liar-not because of any abhorrence of the truth, but merely because of the infirmity of his explanation."⁴⁸ This is sober inebriation in which out-of-self experience makes the mind even clearer of the effability of God.

So it is with Paul, the lofty vision of what laid beyond the third heaven only brought sober sense to Paul as to the ineffability of true

knowledge and the good, thus becomes the incentive to stretch forward to what lies in front of him as described in the eighth Homily [J245].

In the same way Peter experienced "that divine, sober inebriation" which Gregory takes to mean the revelation of the Trinity as the God who purifies.[J310]

All these serve to illustrate the experience of the believer at the Eucharist: "Such is the inebriation from wine which the Lord offers to those at his table and it is through this that the soul's divine ecstasy takes place"⁴⁹ [J310.18-19]. So the act of receiving the Eucharist has the effect of experiencing this sober inebriation in which the receiver can ecstatically proclaim the wonder of God's glory. And if as Gregory would testify, "the Song's works to be in agreement with the Gospel" [J308.14-15] i.e. in harmony with the Eucharistic pronouncement, then the Eucharist would serve as the means to the lofty vision of God by the indwelling of Christ in the elements, which when the believer feeds on them, provides nourishment for the process of divinisation⁵⁰. So, the role of the Church's sacramental act provides the soul a right and sure path in its ascent.

3.4.6 The Watchful Sleep

The intoxicating experience of this lofty vision of God brings the soul beyond its footing in material things. It is like someone, afraid of height, looking down from a cliff to the depths below, he would become dizzy⁵¹, but here the inebriation results in sleep as after a hearty meal, sleep would

overtake one's faculty. Here, according to the Canticle text, "I sleep but my heart is awake" (Canticle 5:2), the apparent contradiction precisely brings out Gregory's concept of watchful sleep. When the soul goes beyond its footing in material things, all sense faculty becomes a hindrance, it is therefore abandoned, the effect is like the sensation of sleep where "there is no vision, hearing, scent, taste no feeling, but the body's tension is loosed" [J312.4-6], and because all sensory function is slackened, the body gradually becomes oblivious to emotion of all kinds, this "makes one unaware of evils." Then can the soul awakes to the immaterial, the contemplation of true goodness. Because the soul is trained to perceive vision in darkness, the effect is no longer dizziness, as the dimensional creation perceives the non-dimensional, but only regards what transcend visible objects. [J313.6] The soul keeps far away from all animal sensations, so that what previously was pleasing as perfume smells as if they were foul stench. "Once all these senses have been put to sleep and are gripped by inaction, the heart's action becomes pure, the reason looks up to heaven, unshaken and unperturbed by the motion of the senses" [J313.13-16]. The inferior is now overshadowed by the good:

"Therefore, when the soul enjoys only the contemplation of Being, it will not arise for those things which effect and by naked, pure insight, the soul will see God in a divine watchfulness."

With the rest of the homilies, Gregory then strives to put this experience into words, knowing full well that words cannot begin to express the lofty experience that is the vision of God and union with him.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. Cf. De Inst. Christ. I.44.27ff; De Perfecta Forma Christiani, 173ff. and also, W. Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*, op.cit. pp.86-102;
2. See Homily four, Chapter Two, 2.4.4.
3. In Homily one, Gregory already has an occasion to this comparison, see Homily one, Chapter Two, 2.1.2.
4. Origen, in his exposition of the Bride being black and comely, implies that this refers to the Gentile Church beseeching the acceptance of the Jewish Church, appealing for harmony, see Or Comm. II. pp.92-107. This is consistent with his interpretation of the Bride as the Church. Not so Gregory of Nyssa, see Homily one, 2.1.2 Here in Homily seven, Gregory now refers to the Gentile Church because it is in the ecclesiastical context and also the Ethiopian Queen was a Gentile (?).
5. This parallels what is said about the Bride/soul in Homily two, Chapter Two, 2.2.2.
6. Perhaps, Gregory is reflecting on the most needed gifts in the church at the time. Pure teaching is certainly required to combat false heresies, a pure conscience means that the keeper of the orthodox faith can withstand any accusations by the opponents in dignity. The addition of virginity certainly reflects the prevailing attitude towards the ascetic life, especially one, already championed by his brother, Basil and his sister Macrina. That virginity and asceticism has become prominent is beyond question at this point. For a glimpse of the contemporary situation, see the correspondence of Basil in G.A. Barrois, *The Fathers Speak*, (NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press 1986) pp.47-60.
7. See Homily six, for ideas differing from Plotinus.
8. Shea, parag 129 and 169, sees this as referring to bishops. The fact that throughout the Homilies Gregory makes no mention of hierarchical ecclesiastical order speaks against this type of identification. In fact it goes a long way in confirming the fact that Gregory is speaking of an ecclesiastical context in which the soul finds conducive in its ascent rather than formulating a doctrine of the Church as such.

9. Although not attested in Scripture, the association of goat(=goat hair cloak) and Galaad(=Gilead) is sufficient for Gregory to point towards the prophet, besides it suits his context well, see McCambley, p.149.
10. See n1 op.cit.
11. See also Homily fifteen, J454.
12. Cf. L.F. Mateo-Seco, "La Exegesis De Gregorio De Nisa A JN X.18," SP, 502-503.
13. This is a sure indication of the willingness in the part of Gregory to follow his doctrine of Akolouthia. For a clear exposition of this doctrine, see P. Mar Gregorios, *Cosmic Man: the Divine Presence* (NY: Paragon House 1988) pp.47-63.
14. St. Paul's lofty vision is used several times by Gregory in his writing, all indicating a mystical context, the ecstatic utterance of Paul in his vision is taken to mean the utter incomprehensibility of God, the despairing note means that Paul is no longer content with his present state of spiritual growth, but is being urged on by the vision to an endless quest. Paul's is to be for the New Testament what Moses experienced in the Old. See McCambley, pp. 5,13,17.
15. See especial Balas, *Metousia Theou*, pp.76-99.
16. There is an interplay between the resurrected life on earth, which is what the passage here alludes to in passing, and the future resurrection of the body. It seems that Gregory is for the idea that what is accomplished in the resurrected life on earth is not only a foretaste of what is to come, but, more importantly, it serves as a "launching pad" for a life "similar to the angels". Other passages include J30-31, J134-135, J343-344. See Part Three, *passim*. for fuller analysis.
17. The clearest example in real life situation of this experience of the divine, Gregory records it for posterity, in the life of his sister Macrina, *Vita Macrinae*. See Chapter twelve, *passim*.
18. This mystical interpretation of the Church again confirms our theory that Gregory is not formulating a doctrine of the Church as such.
19. This comment serves to indicate that the Eunomian controversy is still very much in Gregory's mind, even when he attempts to utter his mystical theology for the edification of the Church. See R.E. Heine, "Gregory of Nyssa's Apology for Allegory," VC 38(1984),

360-370.

20. Cf. Homily three, Chapter Two, 2.3.4.
21. See Homily one, Chapter Two, 2.1.1. The warning in Homily one serves to deter any attempt in abusing the Canticle text. here in Homily nine, it seems that Gregory, having come to the central imagery of the union of the Bride and the Groom, decides that it is again time to issue another warning, but more importantly, he will have occasion of addressing this issue later in the Homily. The prior warning seems doubly warranted.
22. Modern interpreters of the Song of Songs usually bypass the significance of the similarity in the two texts. But allegorical interpreters like Gregory of Nyssa could hardly ignore this significant point for his mystical interpretation. Thus it is all the more surprising that most Gregorian scholars also bypass the point that Gregory makes which we think is most significant.
23. See Langerbeck's note in J264.
24. See Chapter Two, 2.1.4.ii. In Homily one, in praising the Bridegroom as "the scents of your perfumes is beyond all ointments", Gregory has this to say, "This is God's absolute wisdom, justice, truth and all the rest. Therefore, the odour of the heavenly ointments, he says. holds a delight which is incomparable to any aromas known to us". [J36.7-11] Gregory heaps praises on the greatness of the Bridegroom.
25. This is a recurrent theme in Gregory's mystical anthropology. See especially Homily seven, *passim*.
26. For the stress on the importance of scripture, see J4, J133, J144-145, J161-163.
27. On the Garment of skin, see chapter two, *passim*. See also P. Nellas. *Deification in Christ: the Nature of the Human Person*, (NY:SVSP 1987) pp.43-91.
28. Here Gregory may be quoting Gal. 3:27 or Rom. 13:14.
29. Modern interpreters often see the verse as the indictment of the Bridegroom's claiming sole right to the Bride. Gregory, as an allegorical interpreter, capitalizes on the exclusiveness in formulating a life free or protected from evil and temptation from without.
30. The ascetic connotation of Gregory's is again revealed which seems to dichotomize body and soul. We see Gregory struggling with the

justification of the body in his other writings (eg. Cat.Or. 37) and from the interpretation here we know that it is still unresolved in his mind. See especially T.J. Dennis, "St. Gregory of Nyssa's Defence of the Doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body", *Ekkleph* 60(1978) 580-624; 61(1979) 480-562; and in *Εκκλησια και Θεολογία* (London) 1(1980) 431-458; C.W. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336*, (NY: Columbia University Press 1995) pp.81-85. Bynum argues for a negative view of Nyssa on the body, basing on Dennis's analysis, *ibid.*, whereas Dennis sees Gregory as holding an ambiguous view. The two views illustrate the difficulty in pinpointing Gregory's consistent view on the body. See Part Three, *passim*.

31. Note Gregory himself asks several rhetorical questions to justify his method, "These remarkable words render praise to God on high. What do they mean? ...How is a garden of pomegranates sent out from the bride? How does the fruits of choice berries come from pomegranates? How do choice berries form a list of perfumes and spices?" [J278.7-10] The only sensible thing to do is to take the imageries as they are, and that they all combine to describe the beauty of the soul in ascent.
32. See similar description in Homily two, Chapter Two, 2.2.1; Homily seven, this Chapter, 3.1.6.iv.
33. The avoidance of excess is a concept dear to Gregory's thought, as is attested in many of his writings, eg. *De Virg.* pp.282,25-283.25; *Moysis II.* 288; *In Eccl* p.375.4ff.
34. See Homily seven, this Chapter, 3.1.4.
35. See Homily eight, This Chapter, 3.2.4.
36. It goes to show that Gregory is consistent in applying his spirituality to the imageries in the Song of Songs. Minor problems like the imageries of the horse (Homily three, *passim*.) and the woods of Lebanon (Homily eight, *passim*.) only goes to show that Gregory's attempt is remarkable in seeing a trend in the Song of Songs text that informs his mystical theology.
37. DHO PG44.176A-B, Cf. *Phaedo*, 80a, 79d. Harmony must be achieved when the body obeys the soul's command, rendering easy the function of the soul; cf. *De Virg* GNO 8,I.330-333. The complex question of the relation between the body and the soul is dealt with in Chapter two, *passim*. Relevant literature relating to this issue see notes, *passim*., in particular, J.P. Carvarnos, "The Relation of Body and Soul in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa", in, *Gregor von Nyssa und die Philosophie*, pp.61-78.

38. The mention of wind and the act of blowing is consistently apply to the Holy Spirit, which is biblically well attested.
39. Cf. J. Munitiz, "The Church at Prayer: Ecclesiological Aspects of St. Gregory of Nyssa's *In Canticum Canticorum*", ECR 8(1971) 385-395.
40. See A.A. Mosshammer, "Non-Being and Evil in Gregory of Nyssa", op.cit. 136-167.
41. See a detailed analysis in Verna E.F. Harrison, *Grace and Human Freedom*, op.cit.
42. In contradistinction with the twenty-third Psalm, where it is the Lord's initiative to prepare the table. J. Daniélou, *The Bible and The Liturgy*, (Notre Dame: UNDP 1956) pp.177-190, illustrates how Psalm 23[22] is used by early Church Fathers mostly in the context of the sacramental rites of Baptism and the Eucharist. It is almost a universal truth to say that when the Psalm is used that way, v.5 is referred to as the "sacramental table" of the Eucharist. Gregory of Nyssa certainly uses it this way, see In Psa, PG46.692 A-B. Therefore it is interesting that the passages that follows is interpreted in conjunction with the Eucharist, and yet the passage here refers to, the reverse is true, the Bride preparing the meal for the Groom.
43. It seems that this concept has added a richer dimension to the receptacle imagery in Gregory of Nyssa's anthropology, as explicated by V.E.F. Harrison, op.cit.
44. see J189, J249, J342-347, etc.
45. "ἄρτος γὰρ εὐφροσύνης ἐστὶν ἢ εὐποιῖα τῷ μελίτι τῆς ἐντολῆς γλυκαινόμενος".
46. See, for example, Daniélou, *From Glory to Glory*, op.cit. pp.33-46, although he also see the text here as referring to the Eucharist, p.21.
47. De Virg. GNO VIII.1, pp.289.27-290.11; PG46.361B.
48. In Psa PG46.316B.
49. "τοιαυτῆς τοινὺν γνομενῆς τῆς ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου μεθῆς, ὃν προτιθήσι τοῖς συμποταῖς ὁ κύριος".
50. Cf. Cat.Or. 37, where the Eucharist is firmly connected with the divinization of the body.
51. Cf. In Eccl, PG44.729D-732A; Beat.6, PG44.1264C.

CHAPTER FOUR

HOMILIES ELEVEN TO FIFTEEN

4.1 HOMILY ELEVEN: DISCOVERING THE DIVINE BEAUTY ANEW

We would expect that the natural flow of the Canticle text is such that the beginning of Canticle 5:1, where the theme of sleeping and waking, would carry its refrain till the end of Chapter 5 of the Song of Songs¹. To Gregory the idea of watchful sleep fits better with sober inebriation: A person drunk with wine finds his solace in sleep. But because Canticle 5:2ff still continues with the sleep imagery, it means that it would carry a different emphasis from which we have found described in the tenth homily. Indeed, that is what Gregory has in mind.

The situation here is the night, the Bride finds herself getting ready for bed, having taken off her coat and washed her feet, when she hears the voice of her beloved knocking at the door beckoning her to open to him, saying that his head and hair are wet with dew. She cannot see him save his hand that was put through an aperture in the door. (Canticle 5:2-4) Gregory interprets this with the seriousness of dogma, ignoring altogether the playful tryst that is the nuance in the Song². Perhaps it would go against the grain of what Gregory teaches about passionless ascent so far. Gregory capitalises on individual words and impregnates them with as much meaning as the words allow on the theme of purification and ascent, ironically resulting in somewhat impoverished interpretation, as they repeat

what has been said so far save for the interpretation of Cantic 5:4. Consequently, it seems like an anticlimax after the almost ecstatic encounter in watchful sleep and sober inebriation described in Homily Ten. Still, somehow Gregory manages to put everything in focus by resorting to the familiar doctrine of Epektasis, as if scaling great heights only serve to prepare oneself for a beginning yet again, and this beginning needs to recapitulate all that has been learned thus far. The cycle does not go back to the very first beginning, but prepares itself for a new beginning.

4.1.1 To be Alert and Watchful

So, here in Homily Eleven, the preparation for bed, i.e. sleep, is seen in a bad light, as falling asleep no longer means dead to sensory pleasure. Alertness and watchfulness are emphasised, "to overcome sleep in search for the life on high" [J315.19-20]. The Deceiver who creates a kind of drowsiness, i.e. dream-like fantasies is prowling in the night for those who neglect to keep their mind awake to the truth³. Those who fail to ward off the enemy will sink into the deception of this life: "vanity, seductive pleasures, love of glory and its enjoyment, love of honour, and every kind of deception sought after in this life by careless persons" [J316.4-6] These are illusions of life and thus transitory. Thus not only should the Bride strive to ascent but she needs also to ward off whatever ~~that~~ brings a sense of pride in her achievement, lest she falls into the choice for evil, slipping away from "what has substance and true being" [J317.4]. Only a life, lived

in temperance, illumined by the light of pure conscience will triumph under truth's rays [J317]. This is also an appropriate way of preparing for the Bridegroom's summons when he arrives and knocks at the door. This is the first reference to Christ's return in the Homilies.

4.1.2 The Return of the Bridegroom

Christ the Bridegroom has betrothed the Church. "The bride-Church is received into the mystical bridal chamber, and the angels expect the king's return while he heads the Church as a bride to a blessedness befitting her nature" [J318.13-15]. The Bride has prepared herself in purity and passionlessness, awaiting the Groom's return. Are we to infer by these passages that Gregory implies that the espoused Church will have the marriage consummated i.e. complete union with Christ at his return? Yet Gregory is not clear in his idea of Christ's second coming⁴. We are left with a puzzling question as how to relate the Second Coming with the ascent of the soul to union with Christ. The relationship is never fully explored. Here the relationship is made even more ambiguous by the Canticle text, which says that the Beloved is already at the door and knocking. It is obvious from his interpretation of this text, that Gregory does not simply take it to mean the phenomenon of the second coming of Christ, because the situation is shifted back to the existential musing of the Bride in her spiritual ascent⁵:

"She is now disposed to receive God's appearance, but she does not yet receive the Word standing at her door; rather she

admires the sound of his voice. She says this voice is not hers, but the bridegroom's at her door: "The voice of my beloved knocks at the door" [J320.2-7].

The Bride is in her house when she hears the Bridegroom's voice and his knock on the door, implying that "She has not yet delighted at the appearance of her groom's face, but is still led by hearing to participate in the good" [J320.13-16]. What the Bride does not know is infinitely greater than what she already knows and comprehends. "Because of this, the Bridegroom often appears to the soul; although not present to her sight, he promises the bride by his voice that he will appear" [J321.5-7].

4.1.3 Discovering the Divine Beauty Anew

In an illustration of gushing stream that never ceases, Gregory perceives that the person looking at the divine, invisible beauty:

"will always discover it anew since he will see it as something newer and more wondrous in comparison to what he had already comprehended." He continues to wonder at God's continuous revelation; he never exhausts his desire to see more because what he awaits is always more magnificent and more divine than anything he has seen. Thus the bride wonders and is amazed at her knowledge. Despite this, she never ceases to long for further vision" [J321.18-25].

The spiritual ascent thus is multi-faceted involving the transformation of human nature, i.e. the remaking of men, the indwelling of Christ in the human soul, divinising it, so that the vision of God is made possible by further desire for the beautiful and the good.

i. Moses as the Prime Example

The resultant experience is compared to the experience of Moses on Mount Sinai, when "Moses entered into the darkness where God was"⁶. But here, Gregory parallels the experience of the Bride thus far with that of Moses:

a. *Journey from Darkness to Light*

God's manifestation to Moses began with light symbolising withdrawal from deceptive ideas to illuminative knowledge of God⁷. So it is with the Bride, who realised that she was "black" when shadowed by obscure teachings, by dissociating "herself from evil and desired to approach the fountain of light by that mystical kiss, she became bright with the light of truth" [J323.20 - J324.3].

b. *From Light to the Cloud*

As God spoke through a cloud to Moses (Exo. 20:21), so too "a more careful understanding of hidden things leads the soul through appearances to God's hidden nature" [J322.14-15]. As the cloud overshadowing all appearances and which gradually reveals what is hidden from sight, so too the Bride finds her rest under the apple tree's shadow [J324.7], the shade of the tree symbolises the Incarnation, which when compared to Moses' experience would mean that this Incarnation of Christ is to lead to God's hidden nature, "which little by little accustoms the soul to behold what is hidden"

[J322.19 - J323.1].

c. From the Cloud into Darkness

On the entrance into the darkness where God is, Gregory has the classic description here⁸,

"Finally the soul is led on high. Forsaking what human nature can attain, the soul enters within the sanctuary of divine knowledge where she is hemmed in on all sides by the divine darkness. The soul forsakes everything without, that is, appearances and ideas; the only thing left for her contemplation is the unseen and unattainable in which God dwells" [323.1-6].

As for the Bride's experience, she is embraced by a divine night where the Bridegroom comes near but does not appear, because the invisible cannot be seen at night [J324.10].

ii. The Key to Divine Mysteries

Although this invisible nature of the Groom lies hidden, it does not mean that the human soul becomes despair of comprehending the divine, because the Groom takes the initiatives to knock of the door of the human mind, revealing himself, yet not completely, as truth can only be known by the finite mind in part. But by the Groom's affectionate pronouncements of the identity of the Bride, "my sister, my companion, my dove, my perfect one", he in fact holds out the key to opening the door, i.e. the grace of the acceptance of God in intimate relationship becomes the key to unlock the divine mysteries.

The reward of the perceptive mind at the door is the healing dew from the Lord, not in torrents of knowledge for it is impossible for the soul thus to bear. Again Gregory emphasises the importance of the prophets, evangelists and apostles (= Scripture and biblical teaching) in being able to draw "dew" from the hidden and unseen treasures of the divine night, but above all, it is Christ the living fountain, who can ultimately satisfy the continuous thirst of the soul in flight [see J326-327].

4.1.4 Baptism and Putting on Christ

The Bride's mention of removing the garment and washing dust from the feet immediately reminds Gregory of removing the garment of skin and purification, shedding off the old man and putting on the new man is St. Paul's way of putting on God's holiness and righteousness, which in this context means putting on Jesus. No longer does the Bride desire to put off this divine garment after she has removed her garment of skin, "with which she clothed herself after her sin" [J327.19]. For what fellowship can the dark garment have with the luminous, immaterial one? To put on the old one again brings double indemnity and shame. Whereas, "the person who beholds himself clothed with the radiant tunic of the Lord which he put on with purity and incorruptibility is like the tunic Christ showed in his transfiguration on the mountain" [J329.9-12].

So it is with the washing of one's feet, just like Moses was

commanded to remove "from his feet the covering of dead skin." [J329.17-18], when approaching holy ground, and afterwards he fashioned the priestly garments without adornment for his feet, to follow the way we must "remove the covering of the dead man"⁹ [J330.17]. The bride has through baptism once and for all removed her sandals, keeping her feet, like David, undefiled on a rock who directs her footsteps (Ps. 39:3, see J331), "We understand this rock to be the Lord who is the light, truth, incorruptibility, and righteousness with which the spiritual road is paved" [J331.16 - J332.1]. This is perhaps the passage that makes the connection between Baptism and divinisation most explicit¹⁰. The soul is now ready to be sanctified.

4.1.5. The Hand/Handiwork of God

But before the Bride can open the door, a symbolism of shedding the veil of flesh and let her Beloved in, the Bridegroom has already arouse the Bride's desire for seeing him by stretching his hand into the aperture on the door. This she considers to be of enormous gain, if only to see the hand of him whom she desires [J333]. The Groom here "mercifully" only shows his hand to the Bride¹¹, and in Gregory's allegorical category, this fits perfectly well with the description of God's handiwork as the hand symbolises capacity for actions:

"Because the soul reaches from below to a knowledge of the transcendent and to a comprehension of God's wonderful works, it is unable to proceed further in curiously scrutinizing these works; rather, it marvels and worships him who alone is

recognized by his works" [J334.15 - J335.1].

The harmony and order of the natural world, the earth sustained and given to produce lives, all this manifest God's power. "Human nature is not able to contain the infinite, unbounded divine nature" [J337.1-2] but is able to comprehend in part the wonders of God, but we all await that day when the perfect is fully disclosed to man's heart (I Corinthians 2:9, see J336). But what is disclosed already is enough to cause "the belly to move". Such is the amazement and astonishment at the sight of this miracle: We are moved at God's power as manifested in the celestial beauty, the wonder of creation [see J337]. But this is not all, because all the wonders of creation cannot even begin to compare with the ultimate revelation of God in Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God.

Gregory sees the spouse's hand as representing the gift of the Gospel, the good news of the Incarnation of God, in his birth and ministry on Earth. Human life again becomes the receptacle of this ultimate divine condescension to not just dwell with humanity, but becomes a human, manifesting the splendour of God in his ministry yet remained without sin:

"I think that the image of the bride's house represents human life. God's creative hand contracted itself to reside in our small, worthless human existence; he partook of our human nature in everything except sin and filled us with astonishment at his appearance in the flesh, at his birth from his mother who remained a virgin, at the mixture of light with darkness, of life with death, at the shortness of life and at the door's aperture which received him whose hand embraces all things and measures the heavens, earth, and seas. For the bride, her spouse's hand represents the gift of the Gospel. Because God was seen on earth and conversed among men, we have known the pure, immortal beauty of the bridegroom, the Word's divinity, and the splendor of true light by the work of

his hands. For we understand God's hands as the operative power of the wonders by which the dead were restored to life, sight was restored to the blind, suffering of lepers was assuaged, and every kind of incurable and severe illness was dismissed from bodies at his command." [J338.1 - J339.4]

So there is no room for heresy, as we contemplate the incomprehensible, unutterable nature of God, because the Gospel, the mystery of the Bridegroom's hand, is manifested and revealed what cannot be doubted. Again the Incarnation becomes the stamp of the true signpost on the ascent to perfection and participation in God.

4.2 HOMILY TWELVE: THE WOUND IS THE HEALING

Throughout the previous homilies, the role of the Holy Spirit in the spiritual life of the believers is mentioned but we see Gregory giving a cursory nod towards the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit without elaborating on it¹². The twelfth Homily brings to the fore the role and work of the Holy Spirit, focusing on the discipline of the Spirit on the soul in ascent. In effect, the soul does not attain spiritual perfection only on its own effort, the beckoning of the Spirit, convicting the soul and discipling it on the right path becomes paramount after the soul has gone through every available knowledge, through its own awareness of the original predicament in sin and mortality and also through the communal teaching and guidance of the Church, the community in Christ.

4.2.1. The Holy Spirit as the Power for Ascent

It is to be noted that the text of the Song of Songs on which the twelfth Homily is based, i.e. Canticle 5:5-7, does not provide the conventional imagery for either identifying the Holy spirit or his role¹³. Does it suggest that Gregory is willing even to read into the text subjects which he thinks are appropriate for the present stage of the soul's journey? One can never be sure. On the other hand, Gregory does find justification in the Canticle text which mentioned the keeper of the walls unveiling the bride by associating it with St. Paul's words "when a person turns to the Lord, his veil will be removed. The Lord is the Spirit" (2Cor. 3:16-17). In the event, the Corinthian text does prove indispensable in identifying the watchmen and the keepers by night in the Canticle text who smite and wound the Bride, thus tying the whole Homily together to form a more coherent message for the audience: that the sanctifying role of the Holy Spirit is indispensable for the soul to proceed to perfection in the virtuous life¹⁴.

So it is appropriate that Gregory set the next stage of the journey by describing a merchant ship setting on a voyage waiting for a gentle breeze to set sail. It is an apt analogy for the journey of the soul. The goal is set on "the hoped-for wealth". The soul/Church is the "living vessel which expects the riches of the divine guidance in all its fullness" [J341.18-19]. Prayer is offered for a gentle breeze to cross the vast sea which represents "contemplation of the divine words" [J341.15-16]. Danger may arise as is expected by all sea-faring merchants, but the invocation of the prayer for that gentle breeze, the Holy Spirit, to blow, ensures the Spirit's power to

"breathe on us and put into motion the waves of our thoughts" [J342.3-4].

4.2.2. Mortification of the Body and the Doctrine of Evil

If there exists a theme for the twelfth Homily it must be that "The ascent to God always indicates something unbecoming in the bride" which she must proceed to remove [J360.10-12]. This requires the mortification of the bodily passions on the part of the human person and the discipline of the body by the Holy Spirit.

i. The Mortification of the Body

Gregory sets the scene almost immediately when he comments on Canticle text 5:5, "The living Word cannot be present in us (I mean the pure, invisible bridegroom who unites the soul to himself by incorruptibility and holiness), unless we remove the veil of flesh by the mortification of our bodies on earth" [J342.12-16]. This Gregory takes as the exposition of Romans 6:4, "being buried with him through baptism unto death, I rose"¹⁵.

Resurrection must be preceded by a voluntary death. As the Bride rises to open to her beloved, her hands dropped myrrh on the handles of the lock. The fact that her hands dropped myrrh means "a voluntary mortification of her bodily passions" [J344.2-3], flowing from her own free

will.

ii. The Doctrine of Good and Evil

The doctrine of evil is such that evil replaces where good is absent. Conversely, if evil is contained and denied, the good will instantly replace that which was "occupied" by evil deeds, "A blow is truly given to virtue when evil has its day. Because of this it does us well to wipe out ... all thoughts desirous of evil. Once these evils are destroyed, our better part will prosper" [J346.10-16]¹⁶. Mortification of the bodily passions therefore is a constant battle that the believers are called to engage. The control of a particular passion serves to bring to the fore others which need to be stamped out. The theme of the twelfth Homily is made abundantly clear: the ascent to God exposes the soul not only to Goodness in God, but also to its own unbecoming self. So death is a necessary pre-requisite to life which is the doctrine to the Church: "The necessity for death to precede life, for life cannot be in a person unless it enters death's gate" [J345.8-9].

iii. The Metaphor of the Upward and Downward Movement

Human nature is twofold, one light and the other heavy. The heavy and the material tends to drag the light and the intelligent downwards, thus curbing the momentum of the upward flight of the soul¹⁷. "Between these two is located our faculty of free choice which of itself makes the weak

strong and visa versa: our will bestows victory to whichever side it supports" [J346.1-4]. The tension of good and evil (the absence of good) thus comes into play, the choice of good deeds will tilt the see-saw of human nature towards the lighter side, thus enabling the soul to gather momentum in its flight upwards, the reverse is also true, evil deeds weakens the will thus drag the soul downwards.

iv. The Imagery of the Trees in Paradise

Another imagery is given to deepen this concept. In God's paradise, two trees fought to take centre place in the garden, the tree of life and the death-giving tree which is the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The two trees obviously could not occupy the same place at the centre of paradise¹⁸. Both trees had a power contradictory to each other, one bestowed life and the other brought death. In order to avoid being accused of stating the divine origin of evil, Gregory takes pain to explain what he means:

"The lesson we must understand here is that life is the most central of God's plants. Death was not planted, nor did it have roots or room of its own; by the barrenness of its life, participation in the good became fruitless for living beings."
[J349.17 - 350.3]

v. The Ambivalence of Sin

The ambivalence of sin is such that, it is at once good and evil, because it brings pleasure at first, after that it develops into lust and sin.

Gregory then develops his doctrine of sin and fall. It was man who wilfully cut himself off from the good thus brought death to himself, "having exchanged divine life for one brutish and devoid of reason" [J351.3]. This original sin has the effect of making void all those properties pertaining to the life in Paradise:

"Once death had been mixed with nature, mortality passed on to successive generations of children. Thus our very life has become death, for in a way, our life has died. Our life is mortal, indeed, having been deprived of immortality" [J351.4-8].

But by putting to death the bodily passions that hinders the movement upwards, man can exchange this mortal life for immortality, passing from mortal, brutish life to life eternal. Again, this voluntary mortifying of the flesh does not in itself gain eternal life, if not for the grace of "the Word" who presents the seeker with the key to the Kingdom. The gift of the key is faith, and the hands that stretches out to turn the key are the symbolic gesture of mortification and good deeds, since it is the hands dripping with myrrh that put forth to open for the beloved. The act of opening the door is an act of invitation in faith for the beloved to indwell in the soul, thus divinising the whole person [J352-353].

4.2.3. The Doctrine of Epektasis Restated

Again, Gregory launches on with his re-iteration of this process of Epektasis, quoting Paul, saying that "the bride teaches us [again] here that the only way for comprehending that power transcending all understanding

is never to remain in any notion of him, but to always move forward and never stand still." Moses is the best example of this continual striving, resting only by advancing towards that which lies before him and always going out from what he has comprehended. There follows another summary of Moses' experience in his life in ascent to the vision of God¹⁹ [J354.8-J356.11], here the parallel between the experiences of Moses and the bride is pointed out, and stated succinctly thus:

"I believe we are taught that the person desiring to see God can behold the desired One by always following him. The contemplation of God's face is never ending journey toward him accomplished by following right behind the Word. Once the soul has risen through death and has been filled with myrrh, it places its hands on the door's bolt by means of good works and hopes that the desired One will enter within. Then the bridegroom passes by and the bride exits; she no longer remains in the place where she had been, but touches the Word who leads her onward. [J356.11-J357.2]

4.2.4. "I Sought Him, But Find Him Not"

The Bride opens the door but the beloved is no longer there, "I sought him, but find him not, called him, but he did not answer me" (Canticle 5:6). All the preparation to receive the Beloved is inadequate for the ineffable vision of God, therefore the Bride says "I have sought him by my soul's capacities of reflection and understanding; he completely transcended them, and escaped my mind when it drew near to me" [J357.15-18]. The soul has sought for more than it is capable of receiving or comprehending at the present stage. The name of God which is above every name is beyond

human capacity to comprehend, thus when the Bride calls for the name of the Beloved, she receives no answer, not because the Beloved deliberately ignores her, for this is impossible as the Beloved beckons for the Bride to draw near to himself [J363.3] but because the limited cannot grasp the totality of the Limitless.

4.2.5. The Removal of the Veil

The Bride goes out, nevertheless, pursuing in the footsteps of the departed one. But the watchmen in the city find her and wound her, the keepers of the walls take away her veil (Canticle 5:7). The words indicates pain and desperation with bodily harm. To have one's veil taken away would amount to shame and exposure before strangers which is most unbecoming in middle-eastern culture. But in Gregory's imagery, 'they show that the bride boasts in what she finds most beautiful' [J359.14-15]. The words "contain an ascent to something more exalted" [J359.8]. Gregory concentrates on the action of removal of garments; previously the Bride is said to have remove her garments (of skin), the removal of the veil by the keepers is seen not as an assault but a necessary discarding of yet more undesirable worldly state in order to advance to a higher state, "having removed her old tunic and every covering, she became even purer" [J360.6-7]. Thus, the theme of more exposure of dark, unbecoming inclination in the

light of God's glory as the soul ascends is again brought into focus. The removal of garments prepares her for immortality, but the removal of the veil brings her higher: "her eyes are free and unhindered to contemplate her beloved" [J360.18-20]. She no longer feels despair for not being able to behold her Beloved and "the bride will always see more of her beloved's incomprehensible beauty throughout all eternity" [J370.6-8]. It is noted that it is not the Bride herself that uncovers her veil, but the keepers of the city. The city referred to here is the soul [J360.15]. And according to II Cor. 3:16-17, Gregory takes this to mean the Spirit's action on the soul. Thus, the doctrine of synergism is brought into play; it is the Bride who freely removes her garments but it requires the Spirit to uncover her vision for God.

4.2.6. The Wound is the Healing

What of the blow and the wound inflicted on the Bride? Gregory employs a cursive interpretation of Proverbs 23:13 to explain the "benefits" of this disciplinary action: "If you strike [the youth] with a rod, he will not die". Taking it at face value, "he will not die" as immortality. When the youth in the said Proverb was struck, he is rescued from death by disciplining him to good deeds. It is like the rod and the staff which comfort the soul in Psalm 23, from which an abundance of good things comes [J362].

The city guards are the ministering spirits sent to serve those who inherit salvation [J364.5-7]. These guards strikes the Bride, although

wounding her, nevertheless also indicates "the divine rod has penetrated deep within" [J365.10-11]. The blow is marked by a wound of which the Bride is proud, because she is deemed worthy of deep penetration by the divine rod, which is the Holy Spirit, striking deep, not to cause mortal wound, but to effect healing in the human soul²⁰. Like St. Paul who says, "I bear the marks of Christ in my body", these are the marks of disciplinary power of the Spirit and this shows the capacity to transform the weakness of the body into perfected virtue in Christ. [J366, quoting 2Cor. 12:9]. The wound is the healing.

4.2.7. The Spirit as Transforming Power

The Bride's advancement to perfection means that "anything great and marvelous always seems inferior in comparison to what succeeds it" [J366.17-18]. She is now compared to the rock itself (the imagery of the rock being reserved for Christ himself) which Moses struck in order to receive a flowing stream in the desert (Exo.17:6, J367.17 - J368.3). The identification with Christ is implicit, but the role of the Holy Spirit, symbolising the rod of Moses, to effect such identification is even more striking. Thus at long last, Gregory recognises the important step of the part played by the Holy Spirit in the soul's ascent, not just by pointing to the path by illuminating the Scriptural message, or by removing the veil from the spiritual eye of the seeker in order that the vision of God is made possible, but also in completely transforming the soul to effect identification with Christ.

Such is the experience of the prophet Isaiah, when he was granted the vision of the most high, paralleling the experience of the Bride: Isaiah could not see the form of Him on the throne just as the Bride hears and is denied the vision of the form of the Bridegroom; for Isaiah, instead of a veil, the lintels were removed so that his contemplation may not be hindered; in place of guards, the seraphim appeared; as the burning coal administered on the lips of Isaiah did not harm him, so the wound inflicted on the Bride also means purification. The Bride does not question the wound but is proud to wear it as the mark of the divine imprint on the soul, this sets the Bride on yet a further stage in her ascent: "She seeks him who cannot be found, she calls him who cannot be comprehended by any name, is taught by the guards that she loves him who is unattainable, and goes after him who cannot be seized" [J369.19-21].

4.3 HOMILY THIRTEEN: HE WHO SEES THE CHURCH SEES CHRIST

Homily twelve ends with the high point of the Bride's ascent being compared to the prophet Isaiah's vision of the most high. It serves to highlight the increasing role of the Bride as both the exemplar and the bearer of God's glory as the prophets are looked upon to lead the people to greater glory. The role of the Bride as guide in the spiritual pursuit is again explored by the words of the maidens around her, imploring her to show,

"what is your beloved, Oh beautiful among women?" (Canticle 5:9)

Thereupon, the Bride launches into analogical treatise in praise of the One she pursues in order to show clearly the Object of her pursuit and also how she may attain her goal²¹.

4.3.1. The Bride Exhorting the Church

The closest the Bride comes thus far is the privilege of being identified with the source of her love. She is compared to the rock on which Moses struck to obtain a flowing stream of water in the desert. The imagery usually reserved only for Christ is applied to the Bride. This is no small achievement. The indwelling of the source of everlasting Spring in the human soul is such that it is not just the receptacle of the spring, but is transformed by the Holy Spirit into a thirst-quenching source for its fellow seekers. The process of divinisation is very evident here.

But what Gregory says of the human soul, he also points to the same in what he finds in the Church, Christ's Body. Just as the soul can attain close identification with the divine source, so the Church can attain to this blessed stage by the virtue of her own identity, i.e. the Body of Christ himself.

The enquirer after the glorious ascent of the soul is consumed with the desire to know more of him who cannot be known by any name [J379], beseeching the Bride to "give us, you who are filled with loveliness and 'beautiful among women,' a means to recognise him" [J380.1-2]. But how can the Bride do justice to her Groom? No words can fully describe the One

whom she pursues [J380]. Yet, describe she must, in order that perchance some of the characteristics may be recognised and adored, and thus point to the true Lover of the Soul.

4.3.2. The Dual Nature of Christ Makes the Identification with Him Possible

The dual nature of Christ is emphasized: "Christ is both uncreated and created" [J380.15-16]. The first chapter of John's Gospel amply states this fact. He was made flesh and dwelt amongst us, revealing the Father's glory²². But his Incarnation also clearly reveals his own glory, "namely, that God, the only-begotten God in the Father's bosom, appeared in human flesh"²³ [J381.5-7]. The revelation must always be looked upon as a bestowed grace on humanity, since the uncreated part of him is eternal and ineffable: "Since Christ, then, is uncreated and before all ages, eternally incomprehensible, and totally ineffable, that which appeared to us through flesh allowed something of him to ^{be} known".²⁴ [J381.10-12]

Yet, the revelation of the Incarnate Christ is not just merely to manifest his glory. The economy of the Incarnation, is that having the form of God, he lived in the form of the human flesh, so that the salvation of man is achieved. And yet not only this, he remade humanity by uniting with mankind and indwells in it.

"Once he took on by way of first fruits flesh's mortal nature through the incorruptible virgin, Christ continually sanctified the common mass of mankind by uniting it to himself in a mysterious fellowship. He nourishes his own body the Church and harmoniously arranges limbs begotten through faith to form the eye, mouth, hands, and other limbs." [J381.19 - 382.6]

In effect, "he who sees the Church sees Christ who builds and increases it by the addition of the saved" [J383.3-5]. Here, the increase in capacity and quantity is meant. But with the previous passage above, qualitative aspect is even more important. The Church is "continually being sanctified" by her Lord, the process of remaking of this body is set in motion by first the indwelling of the Lord himself and then he "nourishes his own body" meaning, as the Homily continues to tell us, that he not only teaches the Church through the gifted teachers, but more importantly, he "nourishes" his own body with his own divinity! The extent to which Christ divinises the Church is such that he who sees the Church sees Christ! The rest of the Homily devotes itself to this identification of Christ with the Church and vice versa.

4.3.3. Yet the Gulf Still Exists

Again, to avoid confusion in the notion of identification, Gregory emphatically stresses the gulf between the Created and Uncreated²⁵. The identification is possible in so far as the Uncreated wills himself to grace his divine presence in the Created. This results in the Incarnation. The same process can be seen in the indwelling of the divine in the soul of man and corporately in the Church, the Body of Christ; as Gregory amply shows in the fourth Homily²⁶. But the boundary between the Created and the Uncreated can never be broken²⁷. Even when the sanctified Bride, has had her veil removed and her heart wounded by the penetration of Love, she

cannot "speak of what existed from the beginning for she was unable to manifest the ineffable divinity" [J383.17-18], but can only lead the seekers to God's manifestation in the flesh. Thus the Incarnation is the only comprehensive way of understanding the divine, yet the inadequacy of knowledge is made painfully apparent by the gulf that exists between the finite and infinite.

4.3.4. The Church, A New Creation

Nevertheless, he who sees the Church sees Christ, this speaks much for the Church as the visible body of Christ. It is therefore not surprising to read in the thirteenth Homily the intertwining of the notions of the Incarnation and Christ-indwelling Church as the invisible manifested by the visible deeds of the divine. The means of knowing Christ is through his Body the church, and the means of divinising of the Church is through Christ indwelling, he who comprehends this, comprehends the activities of the infinite God:

"Therefore, whoever looks at the visible world and understands the wisdom that has been made manifest by the beauty of creatures, can make an analogy from the visible beauty, the fountain of beauty whose emanation established all living beings in existence. Similarly, whoever views the world of this new creation in the Church sees in it him who is all in all. This person is then led by faith through what is finite and comprehensible to knowledge of the infinite." [J385.22 - 386.9]

The Church is a new creation in every sense of the word. It is a rebirth, a remaking of which what is left of the old making is systematically

discarded. It is a new light of which Christ says "You are the light of the World." (Matt. 5:14, see J385) It is not a reworking of the old, but an entirely new process by which the divine indwells and transforms, so much so that every member and every limb of its being shows forth the glory of the Re-Creator. This is a beginning of a mystery whose roots lie in eternity. [J387]

The identification of the Church with Christ is but a corporate confirmation of the status of the human person who has Christ indwelling in him. Just as the progress through virtue of the human soul is proceeded by the description of the progress through virtue of the Church. The anatomy of identification is applied to both, now, after the twelveth Homily, it is left to clarify the status of the Church as the body of Christ.

4.3.5. The Church as the Body of Christ

But first the beloved Groom is praised with these words "My beloved is white and ruddy, chosen out from myriads". It is appropriate to heap praises on the Archetype in order that when we come to witness his glory through the Church, the distinctiveness and the gulf between the Uncreated and the Created is not lost.

i. The Church is not Christ

Two aspects, especially, made the Incarnation of Christ unique and

unrepeatable: his virgin birth and his sinless existence in the human flesh²⁸. This in contradistinction with human existence in general, all flesh implies birth, "the person, however, who is not subject to a birth of flesh with respect to the mystery of religion does not submit to the actions effected by human nature nor to the passions arising from the mind" [J387.13-18]. Precisely because of this that makes Christ distinct from the human race, for "Christ alone entered this life by a new form of birth. Nature did not co-operate in this birth but served it" [J388.3-5]. The Virgin Birth ensures this. The divine and human nature are not confused. He kept his divine distinctiveness even in human form because, "his birth is undefiled and without pangs" [J388.8-9]. This painless birth to the human race is a contradiction in terms, but to Christ, the notion of human pain and birth is absent when the time come for the Virgin to bring forth the child, "as the Son is given to us without the Father, the Child is thus begotten without birth. The Virgin did not know how the divine body was produced in her body and did not undergo birth pangs" [J388.21 - 389.1]. Further, all other members of Humanity, was conceived in sin, because "woman brought death to human nature through sin, she was condemned to give birth in pain and labour" [J389.6-7]. And sin and pleasure are bed-fellows, therefore the birth pangs which are the result of sin and pleasure is absent in the birth of Christ. Therefore the Virgin "conceived her child with joy and perfect her act of giving birth in Joy" [J389.8-9]. This is appropriate for the saviour, as his birth was in joy, so he brought joy to a grieving humanity who inherited sorrow through childbirth under sin [J389.11-13]. Therefore

the Bride can say "my beloved is white and ruddy" because he was made flesh and he is "chosen from myriads" because he is unique.

ii. Christ, the Head of the Church

Because Christ is the head of the Church, the description of the Bride about her Beloved's head must appropriately apply to Christ also and does not belong to the description of the Church. The Beloved's head is fine gold. To Gregory, the word κεφαλῆ signifies "pure, uncontaminated gold which is free from any impurity" [J390.13-15], and apply to Christ's humanity in sinless existence, i.e. "to that man who received the divinity" [J391.1-2]. In other words, he dwelt in bodily form with the fullness of divinity in him. "He was the first fruit of the common mass of dough by which the Word assumed our nature" [J391.5-7]. This is most important to the concept of divinisation of humanity as shown in Homily four. Because he divinises the human nature in which he existed while in the flesh, "he restored it to purity, and cleansed it from every inherent defect" as the author of Hebrews says "He was tempted in everything according to our nature and was without sin" (Heb. 4:15). This purity, and incorruptibility in Christ again is not found in the mass of humanity in sin. The event of Incarnation is precisely for this sanctification and divinisation of human nature.

The sinless (therefore without human passions) and painless birth and above all his sinless existence in the human flesh is then contrasted to the parts of Christ's body, the Church, which, in the event of spiritual

ascent till she reaches the total identification with the Archetype, needs continual sanctification. For this purpose, Gregory devotes the rest of the Homily and the next, with the aid of the Canticle text.

iii. The Locks as the Process From Death to Glory

"His locks are silver fur, black as raven" (Cant. 5:11). To Gregory, the silver fur is a contrasting description against the raven-like blackness. As is consistent with all the usages of blackness in the Canticle text, it cannot mean anything less than the blackness of sin and death, and the imagery of the raven conjures up the picture of the creature plucking out eyes to use as food for its young (Prov. 30:17), and therefore is tinged with violence and disorder. It would be dishonour to crown these black locks on the Groom's head. The pride of place for the locks come from the miraculous transformation of blackened hair to silver fur. Just like St. Paul who turned from being a blasphemer, prosecutor and a source of violence to a beloved and honorable Apostle, the hair are transformed into a lock "pregnant with the heavenly dew for the entire body of the Church and distilled the hidden, obscure mysteries of God's word" [J392.16 - 393.2], a description used to describe the beloved at the door in Canticle 5:2 (Homily eleven). The honour lies in the transformation, which speaks much for the once sinful state of the Church being willing to change. Thus like a crown of precious stone (Psa. 20:4) on the beloved's head is the humanity transformed.

iv. The Eyes as Guidance

Honour of place is also given to the eyes as above all other organs. They are to serve as sight for the whole body and also have the important function of seer and watchman in case the body falls into passion, are ordained by nature with the guidance of the entire body [see J394]. But before launching out in his description of the eyes, Gregory warns of those who take pride in attaining this position in the Body of Christ thus look down on the rest of the organs: the hands and the eyes all serve a different but uniquely important function in the body:

"The power of sight must be united with truth to effect action. Contemplation by itself cannot perfect the soul unless accompanied by actions which direct a morally good life, nor can an active way of life suffice unless guided by true piety. The eyes, therefore, must be joined to the hands"²⁹ [J393.22 - 394.10].

This is a safeguard to the situation of the uses of the gifts and the exercise of the leadership in the Church, harmony must be preserved and mutual dependence is stressed in order that the Body can be the true representation of its head.

Those who acquire the function of the eyes in the body are as doves (Canticle 5:12) for "they live by the Spirit's direction and are thereby innocent and undefiled" [J395.3-5]. To keep in this innocent and undefiled state means that there is a constant need for washing to keep it pure. The Canticle text says "His eyes are as doves by plentiful waters, washed with milk" (Canticle 5:12). This incurs two types of washing signifying a positive

and a negative aspect. The plural signifies "washing" in different kind of purifying agents e.g. humility, temperance, truth, righteousness, fortitude, desire for the good and aversion from evil. The latter is particularly stressed in the negative aspect of washing in milk. As milk is non-reflective, by washing the eyes in milk, it effectively forms a shield against "deceptive, shadowy pictures of non-existent things which are erroneous, vain, or contrary to the true nature of reality" [J396.16 - 397.1]. This ensures that the eyes have vision only for the truth, "at Being itself" [J397.1].

Another way of keeping the eyes in the right path and vision is to "sit by plentiful waters" meaning that "we must assiduously apply ourselves to the divine teachings" [J397.6-8]. Although there is no mention of the eyelids in the Canticle text, they are there for a reason, according to Gregory, to serve as a defensive wall: "With continence they must hide the purity and splendour of their lives by their eyelids, so to speak, that the ray of conceit may never fall on their vision" [J398.20-24].

4.4 HOMILY FOURTEEN: THE BODY OF CHRIST IS MADE WHOLE THROUGH ITS LIMBS

Homily fourteen continues with the description of the Bride concerning her Groom, but in describing the Groom, Gregory implies that she is actually describing herself as Church being transformed by the Groom. In effect the vision of God is manifested in the person of Christ in his Incarnation, but continues its manifestation in the transformed image of the Church, his body. Central to the fourteenth homily is the dictum:

"The body of Christ is made whole through each of its limbs." [J423.12-13]

4.4.1. The Cheek as Sign of Maturity

The logical sequence is from the eyes to the facial feature immediately below it: the cheek. So it is with Gregory's interpretation. A clear vision of the goal and object of pursuit leads to the desire to impart the same vision in oneself and teach it to the rest of the faithful community. The emphasis becomes even clearer here, that the mystical journey to spiritual heights is not for personal consumption alone, it is to be put to the task of "breaking up food for maintaining the body." [J401.7-9] The act of digesting in question is the movement of the cheeks, which here, Gregory prefers to interpret as the jaws.

The act of chewing food itself in metaphoric terms is a sign of maturity. Milk is replaced by solid food which requires this act of chewing to reduce it to small pieces, a well-attested Biblical image³⁰.

But the imagery of the jaws/cheeks is always linked to that of the eyes. Only persons with pure eyes (=pure visions) can reveal the truth and disclose the deceitful and thus able to maintain the body in healthy nourishment.

The cheeks are described as bowls of spices. Bowls are hardly emphasised for their depth and the capacity to retain large volume of material. But Gregory sees this as precisely the reason why the cheeks are described thus. The shallowness of the bowls, far from being criticized for

their lack of depth, are praised for their simplicity, openness and purity. The inability to retain much volume means that the content is continuously overflowing, and because the bowls are of spices, exude perfume and sweet fragrance which is rightly the fragrance of Christ, because the spices are derived from the Bridegroom himself [J402.21-22, see Homily One]. And once again the ability to receive this perfume comes according to each person's need who receives God's Word, regardless of whether he is Jew or Greek, male or female, lord or slave, young or old. Thus the universal need is emphasised, devoid of any elite notion of the intellectual few who can grasp the knowledge of mysteries. [J403]

4.4.2. The Lips as Proclaiming the Message of Purity

The teaching aspect of the Church makes way for the proclamation of the way which mortifies the world and embrace the spiritual, immaterial way of life: "His lips are lilies, dropping choice myrrh" (Canticle 5:13). This description is not new, as the imageries of lilies and myrrh are used elsewhere in the homilies to the same effect³¹, but the novelty here lies in connecting the mortification and what is implied by the lilies imagery. Gregory puts it succinctly in referring to the episode at Cornelius' house in Acts: "Also the great Peter poured forth the shining lilies of the Word when he was at Cornelius' house, filling his listeners with myrrh" [Acts 10:34-48, J405]. The lilies of the Word refers to the proclamation of purity and truth which transforms the listener's attitude towards worldliness. The

proclaimers are the saints in the Church, like Paul, they became the Church's common mouth, "By a good confession at their time of witness, they were drenched with myrrh in their struggle on behalf of their religion" [J406]. A good example of the receiver of this proclamation is Thecla, the legendary would-be martyr, one of the most faithful disciples of Paul. Thecla received the salvific teaching from the mouth of Paul which "pours out myrrh" and is then dead to the world and live^s alone^s in the Word³².

4.4.3. The Hands as Purity of Action

The next anatomy to be commented on is the hand. Here Gregory begins by stating an obvious but profound fact: the close relation between vision and action. Quoting the need for interdependence amongst the bodily parts in I Corinthians, he especially points out that "a person's action testify to a sharp eye and reveal a virtuous life out of his longing for true beauty" [J406].

The hands of the Groom are described as embossed gold. The association with the head, which is also described as golden, is immediate. Gregory says, "their praise resembles that of the head's, that is , both hands and head are pure and sinless." However this cannot be taken at face value. Gregory maintains the gulf between the Church and her Lord/Head. Whereas by ontology, Christ is pure and sinless, the Church can be transformed into a state resembling her Lord only by removing the "rough edges" of human limitation and capability to sin. The identification is by

association not by fusion. Yet this identification is real enough to warrant a description of an embossed gold: a praise of the highest esteem. " The pure, unadulterated gold of free will might alone remain which has been compared to a pure head of gold." [J408.13-14]

Gregory identifies the hands as "members who administer to the Church's common need at the divine command" [J407.15-16] much as the stewards in the Church described in ICor.4:2. Moreover, "the many hands of the Church's body must be fashioned into something beautiful by the chiseling effected through much reflection so that their hands may be pure gold" [J408.6-9]. This chiseling is the removal of undesirable elements such as vainglory, greed, concern for pleasure and power etc. Thus Gregory brings a very practical aspect of ecclesiastical administration into his concept of mystical theology. The pursuit of holiness and perfection is not only purity of the mind but also the purify of action.

The hands are also described as "plentiful from Tarshish". According to Gregory, "Tarshish" is ambivalent in meaning. Jonah fled from God, intending to take refuge in Tarshish; Psalm 48:7 mentions boats to Tarshish being destroyed by a powerful wind. The wind, as usual, is identified with the Holy Spirit who destroys "evils warring against human nature" which is signifies by the boats to Tarshish. But it is the typical usage of Ezekiel 1:16 where the Greek translation is "His form was like that of Tarshish" that Gregory takes his cue. He quotes "those who know Hebrew say that 'Tarshish' as used here in prophecy signifies anything spiritual and incorporeal which lacks colour" [J410.13-14]. So the whole idea of comparing

the hands to Tarshish is summed up in the meaning which is already expounded above, namely the fact of its removal of "everything external out of the desire to see the invisible." [J411.7-8]

4.4.4. The Belly as Singleness of Purpose

"His belly is an ivory tablet on a sapphire stone." (Canticle 5:14) With this verse comes three imageries intertwining to form one concept: purity of the heart as a suitable attitude to store up the heavenly treasure. The belly, according to Gregory, can be understood as the "rational part of the soul in which is placed the divine teachings" or "a pure heart". This exposition is done by looking at several verses of the Scriptures, apparently linking the belly and the heart, for example in Jeremiah 4:19 "My belly grieves me, and the senses of my heart disturb me" (LXX). The heart must be pure in order to receive the divine tablet, which is the law not written by ink but "by the Spirit of the living God who fashions these letters in the soul" [J414.17-18]. The ivory tablet is actually a solid material for writing, the *πυξίον*, claiming incorruptibility with the passage of time. This suits Gregory well in describing the divine Law in the pure heart, especially with "the dark-blue colour of sapphire provides relief for the weary eyes of persons diligently reading the letters on a tablet because sapphire's splendour naturally makes one's eyes relax." [J413.5-9], with the result that,

"This image counsels us to be attentive to heavenly matters, the place of our treasure. By not growing weary in keeping the

divine precepts, the vision of our divine hope refreshes our soul's eyes". [J415.7-12]

4.4.5. The Legs as Firm Foundation

"His legs are marble pillars set on golden bases." (Canticle 5:15) The meaning is clear. Legs are for supporting the whole body, they are shaped with marble pillars for the house of God, signifying firm foundation in the truth, which is the golden bases. The very mention of pillars reminds Gregory of the pillars of the Church whom Paul identify as Peter, James and John (Galatians 2:9) and all those worthy of the same name [J416.14-16]. But more importantly, the pillars of our faith are the two commandments of our Lord: to love God and to love one's neighbour. This is explicated in Paul's advice to Timothy, i.e. to keep faith and conscience (ITim.3:15): "Faith leads to loving God with all one's heart, soul and strength; a good conscience consists of a loving disposition towards one's neighbour." [J419:4-7] Thus Gregory's advice becomes more practical as he sees the Church's transformation into the body of Christ. The Church must not only be the Body of Christ, it must also fulfil the commandment of Christ.

4.4.6. The Body of Christ is Made Whole through its Limbs

Seeing as a whole, the form of the Groom "is as Lebanon, choice as the Cedars." (Cant.5:15) The imagery is of the forest of Cedar in Lebanon, with one of them the choicest of the trees. Here Gregory brings a climax to

his description of the body of Christ: "The body of Christ is made whole through each of its limbs." [J423.12-13]³³ Lebanon, as usual, connotes two opposite interpretations in the Scriptures. The one to be rejected is the evil forces which threaten to destroy God's work, but when the spouse is described as the choicest of Lebanon Cedars, the obvious interpretation is to take Psalm 91:13, "The just man will flourish as a palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon" [J423.1-2]. Just as the Incarnate Christ "rose from the earth for us" [J423.3], he becomes like a palm tree flourishing in the souls of those he indwells:

"In our human nature, Christ became a mountain which filled with cedars those rooted through faith in him. When planted in God's house, they will flourish in the courts of our God". [J423.4-7]

Lebanon, with its ambivalent meaning in the scriptures, now signifying good; now signifying bad, serves as an excellent symbol for the battle of the good over evil, with evil finally being overcome by the good³⁴.

And finally, the throat of the Groom is described as "sweet, and altogether desirable" (Cant.5:16). Throat is the channel in which sound from the windpipe is emanated, thus has something to do with speech. Here, it would be easily identified with "the ministers and interpreters of the Word in whom Christ speaks." [J425.5-6] By now, we could see how important Gregory places the preachers and interpreters of the Word in the life of the Church, imagery after imagery refer to this particular group of people, the prophets and apostles among them.

Gregory then sums up the essential ingredient of a harmonious

ecclesiastical community, where every member has its part in order that by working together Christ is made whole through each of its limbs:

"How blessed are those limbs which made the bridegroom so desirable! Perfect in every good, the bridegroom's limbs form a desirable beauty composed from all his members. Not only is he desirable in his eyes, hands, and locks, but also in his feet, legs and throat. No member is less account because of another's superiority". [J426.1-8]

4.4.7. The Crux of Mystical Anthropology

Canticle 5:16 then serves as a perfect summary of everything that has been said thus far as the whole book draws to some sort of a conclusion in Homily fifteen: "This is my beloved, and this is my friend, oh daughters of Jerusalem."

The mention of friend (neighbour) immediately brings to mind the parable of the good Samaritan with the lawyer's testing of Jesus by asking, "Who is my neighbour?" Each interpreter of the Parable has his own agenda. Gregory of Nyssa uses the Parable as a summary of his mystical anthropology. In his own words, he concisely explains each component of the parable, thus:

"Then the word of God explained in a story the full dispensation of God's love for mankind: 'He told of man's descent from heaven, the ambush of robbers, the removal of the garment of incorruptibility, sins wound, and the progress of sin over half of man's nature while the soul remained immortal.'" [J427.9-13]

Neither priest nor Levite tended the wound of the man, calling attention to "the passing by of the Law which was of no avail" [J427.13-14].

However, the Incarnation changes all that with Christ putting on "our full human nature as the first fruits of the dough which included a part of each race: Jews, Samaritan, Greek and all mankind" [J427.21 - J428.2]. With his body, he healed mankind, and made for them "his loving providence a resting place in which all those who labour and are burdened can rest. Whoever enters him receives him." [J428.5-8]

Here lies his mystical anthropology, "Therefore, man receives within his own capacity the one who cannot be contained" [J428.10]. The immediacy of the indwelling is constantly frustrated by the fact that "he cannot be contained", but this does not lead to despair, but further desire to empty oneself and "receive" more of the divine nature. The desire spurs him on to greater spiritual height.

But lest the whole journey becomes too individualistic and becomes wholly mystical and elitist, we are reminded of the two denarii that the Lord gave, signifying faith in God and a good conscience with regard to our fellow men, to love God and also neighbour, until his coming again both to receive and to judge,

"By understanding these characteristics of the bridegroom, we will find and receive him by the Holy Spirit's guidance for the salvation of our souls, to whom be glory forever and ever, Amen." [J429.12-15]

4.5 HOMILY FIFTEEN: UNION IN PERFECT LOVE

The last of the Homilies is indeed a conclusion of the thoughts on the spiritual ascent with a few implications left unexplored. For example, the

doctrine of Apokatastasis³⁵ is hinted at almost like a benediction, "All will look to the same goal, and every evil will be destroyed. God will be all in all, all persons will be united together in the fellowship of the Good, Christ Jesus our Lord." [J469.4-8]. But besides tying up loose ends, Gregory does propose some new ideas in this Homily.

The journey seems to come to its climax with the words in Canticle 6:3, "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine." A total union with the beloved Bridegroom of the Bride is suggested but not explicated. The perfect union of humanity with its Lord still lies in the future as the last comment above suggests, yet the indwelling of Christ in the human soul can be said to have initiated this union by transforming it and divinising it so that union is achieved on every stage of the soul's journey, according to the measure of the capacity of the soul receiving its Lord. So, instead of using the imagery of progressing journey, Gregory gradually but surely transfers it to the imagery of identification with the Archetype. Thus the soul is said to be the fragrance of Christ, not only a mere receptacle of that fragrance, but exuding the very odour which is Christ. The same can be said of the Church, the body of Christ, so much so that, when the World sees the Church it sees Christ manifesting himself through the Church, but the Church will be the only manifestation of her Lord in that each of her members become "the limbs" of Christ. This is the culmination of Gregory of Nyssa's mystical anthropology.

4.5.1. Knowledge of God Leads to the Desire to Follow Him

Thus when the young maidens enquire as to where the Bridegroom is so that they can seek him with the Bride, the answer is no longer tentative but a definite knowledge, "My beloved has gone to his garden" (Canticle 6:2) and the Bride can now rejoice in the identification of herself with her Groom, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine" (Canticle 6:3).

The sermon form is evident here as elsewhere. Gregory starts with some illustrations from the Gospel narratives of introduction of the Lord by his disciples to others as a fitting way of introducing the thought in Canticle 6:1. Andrew introduced the Lord to Peter; Philip brought Nathaniel to the light, and Andrew was himself led by the Baptist to see the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world. "Just as Andrew was led by John's voice to the Lamb and Nathaniel was guided by Philip's light who left the Law's shadow and entered the true light, the young maidens was led to discover the good revealed to them by soul perfected through beauty" [J434.8-14]. The question of the maidens follow the enquiry as to who the Groom was, now that they can positively identify the Groom, his location becomes of paramount important: "By knowing his location, the maidens might worship the place where he stands and learn where he looked aside that they might see his glory whose manifestation is salvation to those beholding it." [J435.2-5]

As it turns out, the "location" is not in fact clear, what is clear is the concept of "where the beloved has gone". This excludes any possibility of a developed ecclesiological implication or the evangelical role of the Church which one would have expected after such a developed description of the

role of the Church³⁶.

4.5.2. The Process of Indwelling

"Where the beloved has gone" thus is yet another occasion to expound on the indwelling of Christ in the soul. He has "gone down to his garden" (Canticle 6:2). This descent is again, according to the convention of allegory adopted by Gregory, equated to the one going down from Jerusalem to Jericho in the Parable³⁷, but this time the Parable has a twist. Instead of equating Christ with the Samaritan, he was in fact the victim who fell among robbers, "which signifies his descent from his ineffable majesty to the humility of our human nature" [J436.14-16]. When this imagery is equated with that of the garden in the Song of Songs, we find that Christ has come down to the garden of human nature, which was once perfect but was devastated, "so God came down again to adorn the garden with the plants of virtues, for it had become a desert". [J437.4-5] The descent is the indwelling in souls, not of vice, but of virtue, for only a virtuous soul is capable and worthy to receive the Lord. As a result, "the bridegroom makes them thrive by the flourishing of lilies and teem with the fruitfulness of spices," [J438.8-11] Lilies being "whatever is true, righteous, honourable, pleasing, holy, auspicious, virtuous and worthy of praise." (Phil. 4:8, J438.18-20)

4.5.3. For Me to Live is Christ

At this stage of the soul's quest for perfection and its longing to return to its source, "we learn that the purified soul must have God alone and never look at anything except him" [J439.5-7]. So it is not surprising that we hear the Bride's ecstatic cry, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." (Canticle 6:3) "Such is the measure and bond of perfection in virtue" [J439.5]. Just like a true and accurate portrait leads the spectator to exclaim not only the beauty of the artistic form but to delve deeply into the character of which the picture portrays, "the model's beauty is in likeness and the archetype is clearly seen by the imitation, ... In her conformity to Christ she receives her proper beauty" [J439.16-18]. And like the already familiar imagery of the mirror, the image reflected in it an accurate representation of the actual object provided that the mirror is pure and unstained, therefore can the soul, which is "a living mirror possessing free will say: when I look at my beloved's face, the beauty of his form is reflected in me" [J440.6-7]. This pure and unstained mirror would be, like Paul, rids of any human or material passion, "neither pleasure, grief, anger, fear, timidity, strong passions, pride, rashness, ill-will, jealousy, vindictiveness, love of gain, nor any such habit that ruins his soul" [J440.14-19], thus, like Paul, the purified soul can say "for me to live is Christ".

But by ridding the soul of the unwanted material passion alone is not enough to fit the ecstatic utterance "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." Just like we become the food we have eaten³⁸, the nourishment that we take in, which is provided by God, makes us what we are, radiance in

"continence, righteousness, fortitude, prudence, and whatever the Apostle says is true, honourable, worthy of love, just, holy, gracious, virtuous or worthy of praise" [J442.4-6]. These are all the positive virtues that fill the void that purging of material passion left behind.

4.5.4. The Logic of Incarnation and Perfection in Virtue

There follows a bestowal of glory on the soul by God who previously receives the glory from it. Thus the Word says to the Bride "You are fair, my companion, as pleasure, beautiful as Jerusalem" (Canticle 6:4). Two words are singled out for attention as to the praise for the exalted soul: pleasure and Jerusalem: "By these terms the Word clearly reveals the correct manner of ascent until the soul is exalted and reaches out for her Lord's glorious deeds" [J443.4-8]. In a cryptic way, Gregory sees these as applying to the relation between the Incarnation and the exalted soul. It was at the Incarnation of Christ that the voice of the heavenly host was heard in the city of the great king, Jerusalem, to the effect that "Peace" was born on earth for the Father's good pleasure. The direct link between the Incarnation and the soul's perfection in virtue is most remarkable.

The "logic" or mechanics of the working out of this concept is thus:

- i. "If God is on high, then the One in the Father's bosom is united with men of flesh and blood for bringing peace on earth to please the Father." [J443.10-11]

ii. It is the good pleasure of God that his Son should be born in the City of the Great King (Matt. 5:35) which is Jerusalem. Thus Jerusalem "contains within itself the uncontainable" [J444.4]. God dwells and walks in it, exactly like what Christ does in indwelling human nature.

iii. The earthly Jerusalem is but an image of the true heavenly Jerusalem, which manifested God's majesty, "free and mother of the free" [J444.8]. The divine beauty thus manifested is characterized by truth, righteousness and meekness.

iv. Likewise, "the soul formed by such embellishments becomes lovely like Jerusalem which is adorned by the King's beauty" [J445.1-3].

v. The soul thus adorned by this great beauty imitates its Lord by cutting off its life that its kinsmen may be saved, for "the Lord emptied himself by taking on the form of a slave and who gave himself for the life of the world" [J444.2-4]. And so, like Paul in Romans 9:3, "the soul is to others what Christ was to his human nature" [J443.14-15]³⁹.

Here the fact of the Incarnation is again paramount to the soul's understanding of its ascent and goal. The soul is divinised and shows forth

the divine beauty by the processes of the divine indwelling and by its own willingness to imitate the divine passion. The soul is thus set in array as "terrible armies" (Cant. 6:4), signifying its possession of power to combat evil dominations, terrible armies referred to here are the transcendent powers or ministering spirits [J445 and J446].

4.5.5. The Rest in Flight

The praise of the Bride continues with the words, "Turn away your eyes from before me, for they have given me wings" (Canticle 6:5). Then, in Gregory's time, as now, the provenance of these words remains a contentious one, but Gregory side-steps the debate by concentrating on the word, Wings.⁴⁰

Gregory quotes several scriptural passages to illustrate that the word, Wings, has divine connotation, as in, "You will hide me in the shadow of your wings" (Psalm 16:8), signifying that wings may be symbolically applied to "God's power, blessedness, incorruptibility and anything else" [J448.7-9]. These divine attributes were in man in the beginning, but sin robbed man of these, it is as though man was clipped of his wings and fell, but God's grace is such that by rejecting impiety and worldly desires, "We might again grow wings through holiness and righteousness" [J448.15-16]. But because of God's righteousness and holiness, what he sees in man will be devoid of what is contrary to his divine person, thus, "turn away your

eyes from before me" (Canticle 6:5). And the soul that acquire the wings of a dove through the virtues can now have "the power of flight" [J449.20]. The exalted state of the soul is such that the paradoxical term is used: rest in flight meaning that it can "rest in the same repose which God had when He rested from his works" [J450.1-3].

4.5.6 In Praise of the Exalted Soul

In Homily seven, the anatomy of the Bride, from eyes, lips, teeth, breasts, throat etc., applies to the Universal Church as each member works together for the good of the whole church. The eyes, for example are instructors and teachers to guide the Church through her precarious journey plagued with heresies etc.

Here again Gregory brings the Church into the picture as he concludes his exposition, serving as a summary of what has been said before, if only to draw out the deeper tie between the soul in flight and the function of the Church in this flight. Nothing is new here, as the description of the bride here is in all practical purposes the same as that in Homily seven (Compare Canticle 4:1-3 and Canticle 6:5-7).

The hair, lacking sensation, signifies an ascetic life which is glorified as the hair is to the woman. Gregory then expands a little on his thought on the verse that says "Your hair is as flocks of goats, which have appeared from Galaad" (Canticle 6:5).

The prophet Elijah is still being referred here⁴¹, but the imagery of

the flock of goats focuses here on the agility of the animals in passing through rough and difficult places, thus "can go safely on the road to virtue" [J453.6] and also their ability to lead the herd along the right path, thus, like Elijah who "stands out as an eminent guide in his zeal for God" [J453.20-21], the leaders in the church are praised.

Likewise, the teeth is praised for the very function of breaking spiritual food into palatable bits to nourish the Church's body⁴²; the lips for uttering the redemptive message in the blood of Christ: the cheeks showing forth inner treasure by outward life.

4.5.7. Each According to His Measure

What of the description, "There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and maidens without number"? (Canticle 6:8) Gregory has always had a fascination for numbers, and his interpretation is ingenious⁴³. With Canticle 6:8, Gregory propounds a doctrine of progress in virtue by the measure of stature in each individual pursuers of truth.

From the beginning, human nature is created perfect. This was the very summit and perfection of goodness in that God created man according to his image and likeness. [J458] But this human nature has become subjected to death because of its disposition to evil. In order to be restored to its original glory in perfection, it will have to progress towards the good by gradually getting rid of the inclination towards evil:

"In the first creation there was no impediment present with the birth of our human nature, for it was perfect and lacked

evil. But in our second restoration, an interval of time necessarily accompanies those pursuing the first good. Because our minds incline towards evil, the association with evil is removed like bark which is gradually scraped off by a more becoming life". [J458.17-J459.4]

This progress towards the good is different for each individual according to the advantage he has in life of faith or simply out of a desire for the truth and the good:

"God accepts each person according to his free will; He allots the choice according to each one's worthiness, bestows compensations to nobler person, and measures out rewards to those of a lesser account". [J459.16-J460.2]

The characters in Canticle 6:8-9, the young maidens without number; the eighty concubines; the sixty queens and above all the ride, the perfect dove do not represent stages in the soul's ascent, but souls at various stages of their ascents.

i. The Young Maidens as Those Approaching out of Fear

The young maidens without number represent those with obvious disadvantage at spiritual birth. They are incapable of ascent in faith, and even when they could, it is out of fear, "however, they still have an infantile, imperfect understanding, or a somewhat brutish disposition" [J461.2-3]. This almost irrational fear is termed beastly. Nevertheless they are still begotten by the Word of faith and thus are saved. These numbered amongst the most in the human race (hence "without number").

ii. The Concubines as Those Approaching out of Fear of Punishment

The next category is those who "cultivate virtue out of fear of punishment" [J462.1]. By fleeing any contact with adultery, they pursue goodness simply for the sake of escaping divine retaliation. These are called "concubines". But why "eighty" concubines? Fear is somehow associated with the number eight in Gregory's system. He uses the title of the Psalms to illustrate this. In Psalm 6, for example, the title in LXX proclaims: "For the end, a psalm of David, among the hymns for the eighth", Gregory explains:

"The palms with the inscription eight admonish us out of fear for things hoped for and bend God's ears to us in mercy. The number eight speaks of a fearful judge; 'Lord, rebuke me not in your anger, nor chasten me in your wrath. Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am languishing; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled' (Psa. 6:2-3)". [J464.5-11]

This fear of punishment drives the soul to the good by abandoning evil. And because this is not an isolated instance in the Scriptural record, in fact, according to Gregory, there are many more, we have a tenfold increase, indicating the abundance of such persons who act out of fear not of love, "But fear of the number eight which increases ten-fold by good actions, such a person attains the number eighty" [J465.12-15].

iii. The Queens as Those who Purity for its Sake

Next comes the title of the queens. They are those who "are united in incorruptibility to God's purity"[J462.4]. And why "sixty" queens? "There are six commandments which prepare the kingdom of God."⁴⁴ [J462.16-17]:

"Each of these commandments is a talent which the master offers to the good and faithful steward. It is to be multiplied ten times through good works in order that we may enter the Lord's joy after being found faithful in small matters and that we may be set over many things". [J462.19-J463.7]

iv. The Bride as Those who Progress Through Love Alone

The emphasis in all the illustrations above is on good works, either to relieve some of fear of punishment or simply as a way in progress through the virtuous life. It is only when we come to the bride that we see the new perspective of progress through love alone.

4.5.8. Perfect Love Unites All

As Gregory draws his exposition to a close, he also leave the best till last: perfect love that unite the seeker with the sought-after. Perfect love casts out fear, this is declared in IJohn 4:18, then according to Gregory, "if fear changes into love, then unity follows, the result of salvation, for all have been united in the sole good through that perfection symbolised by a dove: 'My dove, my perfect one is one; she is the one of her mother, she is the choice of her who bore her' (Cant. 6:9) [J466.7-12].

The blessedness of the Bride is such that she is now of the Spirit, the glory of which Christ in his prayer promised those who are his. Throughout oneness is emphasised. The soul, by virtue of the new birth, is the offspring of the Dove, the Holy Spirit. And Christ while taking up human nature,

received this glory, which is the Spirit, which he already had before the world's beginning. "Because his human nature was glorified by the Spirit, such a relationship in the glory of the Spirit is distributed to everyone united with Christ, beginning with the disciples" [J467.10-15].

Thus the way is clear, those who are born of the Spirit is spirit, and as they progress in their spiritual ascent, guided all the while by the example of the Incarnation, they can hope to achieve the same goal, destroying every evil, which is that "all persons will be united together in fellowship of the Good" [J469.7-8]. Those young maidens, concubines and queens who praise the Bride's ascent to this perfect can also hope to achieve the same goal if they so desire by pressing forward in their upward course [J459], and God will be all in all.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. This is expected in any modern commentaries, eg. Pope and Murphy.
2. The response of the Bride to the beckoning of the Groom seems to be a teasing tryst on the part of the Bride, the building up of the contradictory emotion of wanting and resisting so as to arouse the Groom to greater desire to enter. Modern interpreter like M. Falk admits that the biggest challenge in interpreting and translating this part of the Song of Songs is to find a form that can pay tribute to the complex imageries that are conjured up in it. But the hesitation and a somewhat playful way in which the female protagonist put into her respond to the beloved's request is not lost. See M. Falk, *The Song of Songs: a New Translation and Interpretation*, (NY: Harpers 1990), pp.121-123; 184-185.
3. Most modern interpreters would agree to the dream fantasy sequence here, but only allegorical interpreters would capitalise on the notion of the night as evil and vulnerable, as Gregory does here.
4. We would venture to say that Gregory does not expound of this part of the doctrine of Christianity in any of his works.
5. Thus, it is one of the weaknesses of allegorical interpretation that the interpreter uses imageries and words by association to an idea or ideas in the Scripture but later is forced to disregard them as the text required. It also limit the flow of interpretation regardless of whether the interpreter would like it or not. Here is a good example of Gregory linking the text on wakefulness, by association, to the watchfulness that is required for the expectation of the Lord's return, and is forced to abandon full exploration of the implication because the text explicate a direct response from the Bride, which in the case of Second Coming, means a necessary delay. Thus, Gregory reverts back to his theme of spiritual ascent which can really stand on its own without the mention of the expectation of the Lord's return.
6. Cf. Exodus 20:21. This, of course, Gregory expands into a later treatise, *De Vita Moysis*.
7. Cf. *Moysis*, II.162.

8. Cf. Moysis, II.163: "For leaving behind everything that is observed, not only what sense comprehends but also what the intelligence thinks it sees, it keeps on penetrating deeper until by the intelligence's yearning for understanding it gains to the invisible and the incomprehensible, and there it sees God. This is the true knowledge of what is sought; this is the seeing that consists of not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of darkness".
9. See *Moysis*, II.22 for fuller explanation dead skin = sandals. Note that the lack of adornment of the priests' feet is not explained in *De Vita Moysis*.
10. See Part Three, *passim*. for a fuller investigation.
11. Lest Gregory should be accused of expounding the participation of man in divinity to the extend of fusion with God like some mystics tend to imply. Gregory strongly emphasises the gap between the Created and the Uncreated. God is known or recognised in his works. This he expounds in his theological treatises, in line with his brother's idea of divine incomprehensibility.
12. See eg. J148; J154; J161. See also A. Meredith, "The Pneumatology of the Cappadocian Fathers and the Creed of Constantinople," *ITQ* 1981, 196-211; K. Yamamura, "The Development of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in Patristic Philosophy: St. Basil and St. Gregory of Nyssa," *SVSQ* 18(1974) 3-21.
13. The imageries for the Holy Spirit in the Song of Songs as used by Gregory of Nyssa are dove, wind and fire, all biblically based.
14. This gracious work of the Holy Spirit can best be described by Gregory's theory of synergism, the co-operation between divine grace and human striving in the virtuous life. Already in *De Virginitate*, he quite emphatically says that "few can be such strangers to evangelic mysteries as not to know that there is but one vehicle on which man's soul can mount into the heavens, viz. the self-made likeness in himself to the descending Dove, whose wings David the Prophet also longed for. This is the allegorical name used in Scripture for the power of the Holy Spirit" (*De. Virg* 11). But perhaps the most explicit of his concept is in *De Institutio Christiano* where he says that life's goal is "the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in a pure and blameless soul which has distanced itself from all evil and wickedness and shame. For when a soul hates sin, it makes itself suitable for God" (*De inst. Chr.* GNO 8, 61.17-20). The Canticle text 5:5-7 suitably provides the context to expound on this concept of synergism.

15. Or as Mosshammer puts it aptly," although Christ entered upon the akme of evil to reunite the whole humanity to God, each one must freely choose to halt the course of evil by participating in the death and resurrection of Christ", in "Non-Being and Evil", art.cit. 157.
16. Again quoting Mosshammer, *ibid.*, "Evil appears still to hold being in its grasp, even after the decisive/intervention of Christ".
17. Cf. Gregory's commentary on the Beatitudes, where according to G.E. Gould, "Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa on the Beatitudes", SP 22(1989) p15, what is keeping the soul from ascending into union with God is the fact that man is inevitably tied down to matter which acts as "an impediment to spiritual progress which imposes a downward drag on the Christian as he attempts to higher things". See also DAR PG46.236, where it is stated, "When the chains, so to speak, around the soul are broken, its ascent to the good is light and free, since no bodily weight is dragging it down".
18. The controversial issue of the identity of the two trees is explored in J. Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality*, (London:SCM 1992), pp.57-61. All Gregory is concerned here is the fact that one causes death to enter into the World and the other point towards life and immortality.
19. See Hom eleven, this Chapter, 4.1, for similar exposition.
20. The description seems to be a step higher than that which is described in Hom four.H. There the divine indwelling becomes a reality in the person, whereas here it is not only a reality but a great transforming force by the indwelling Holy Spirit.
21. The role of the Bride as exemplar and guidance in Gregory's exposition is akin to the role of the Abba in the ancient Monastic tradition. For the role of the Abba, see, G. Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, (Oxford:Clarendon Press 1993), pp.26-87.
22. John 1:1-18.
23. This is a standard pronouncement of the Incarnation in the post-Nicene Christology. See Athanasius' Incarn; see also F.M. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and its Background*, (London:SCM 1983), pp.57-122.
24. See A. Meredith, "God-fittingness in Gregory of Nyssa," SP p512, comments aptly, "But it is perhaps worth remembering in our enthusiasm for [Gregory's] apophaticism that he was also a

- theologian who believed the validity of our perceptions about the nature of God, derived either from creation or revelation".
25. The idea of identification in Gregory here does not mean fusion or changeability of identity between the two subjects, it is like the description of the soul being the mirror image of its Archetype, a reflection of the attributes of Christ on the Church.
 26. See Homily four, Chapter Two, 2.4.4.
 27. Similar realisation on the part of the soul that there is a difference in kind not just in degree between the soul and Christ is played out here between the Church and Christ. See Homily four, Chapter Two, 2.4.5.
 28. Cf. J.H. Srawley, "St. Gregory of Nyssa on the Sinlessness of Christ", art.cit. 434-441.
 29. The stress on contemplation with action safeguard the idea that the soul can retreat into its own concern of solitariness in its quest for perfection. It must be stressed however that Gregory put the context of the symbolism of the eyes needing the hands is in the Pauline way of exercising gifts, not so much as the spiritual guideline for the soul in flight, as in Hom seven F.i., the emphasis now lies on the achievement of unity in the Church.
 30. As in the Pauline Corpus and in Hebrews; eg. I Cor. 3:1-2; Heb. 5:12-14, where chewing solid food is always taken as a sure sign of maturity.
 31. For the imagery of the lilies, see J113-114, J169-170, J240; and the imagery of myrrh is common symbolism of mortification throughout the Homilies.
 32. Gregory's sister Macrina is described by him as the second Thecla, both because she was given this namesake secretly and also because she lived an exemplary life of ascetism, in contrary to the idea of martyrdom, which is not emphasised here, see Chapter twelve, *passim.*, on Macrina.
 33. "ἐπεῖδη τοινύν τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ διὰ τῶν καθ' ἑκαστὸν ἐκπληροῦται".
 34. This symbol prepares the way, in Homily fifteen, for the concept of the restoration of man and the elimination of all evils in the final apokatastasis; see Homily fifteen, *passim.*

35. The Doctrine of Apokatastasis is treated in other works of Gregory, with most of the discussion on the alleged influence of Origen, see a discussion by A.A. Mosshammer, "Historical Time and the Apokatastasis according to Gregory of Nyssa", SP 27(1993) 70-93.
36. Gregory's is not interested in full fledged ecclesiology but seeing the role of the Church as an integral part of the ascent of the soul, not the other way round.
37. See Homily fourteen, 4.4.7.
38. Cf. Cat. Or. 37, the context there is of course the Eucharist. This in fact makes it even more poignant when used in the context of Christ indwelling in human nature. The above two ideas is explored together in Homily ten, see also our analysis in Part Three, *passim*.
39. This is actually the summary of what has been said in Homily nine.
40. Pope, p564, translates the phrase as, "they drive me wild," taking the causative stem of the verb *rhb* as meaning disturbed by disturbing behaviour. LXX renders the verb, "they made me fly", which is the interpretation of Gregory, flight is the key movement as befits the ascent of the soul, but Gregory also place emphasis on the instrument of the flight, the wings, also befitting his Platonic interpretation of the clipped and recovered wings in Phaedrus 249d ff.
41. Cf. Homily seven, Chapter three, 3.1.6.ii.
42. Cf. Homily seven, Chapter Three, 3.1.6.iii.
43. But it is also to the credit of Gregory of Nyssa that he does not view his interpretation as most authoritative or the only view there is, he humbly says: "If our consideration of the numbers mentioned above seems farfetched, one should remember that a person cannot attain the truth contained in the Song's words. We have only examined those symbols in a general way that we may not leave them unexamined". [J466.1-5]
44. The six commandments are not specified here, perhaps they refer to the six parables that Jesus told about the Kingdom of God.

PART III

THE ESSENCE OF MYSTICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

CHAPTER FIVE

MYSTICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE USE OF ALLEGORY

That St. Gregory of Nyssa uses ~~the~~ allegorical interpretation in his homilies on The Song of Songs is to be expected. In defence of the use of allegory, Gregory of Nyssa has this to say in the prologue to his work:

"Because some members of the Church always think it right to follow the letter of holy scripture and do not take into account the symbolic and allegorical meanings, we must answer those who accuse us of doing so: there is nothing unusual in searching the divinely inspired scriptures with every means at our disposal." (J4)

And therefore whether it be literal sense or hidden, symbolic sense or the unravelling of a riddle, " it makes no difference what we call it - tropology or allegory - as long as we grasp the meaning of [scripture's] words." In saying this, Gregory is following a host of previous interpreters¹, whether Jewish or Christian, all inheriting from the Greek allegorical tradition of interpreting classical texts, including Hippolytus of Rome, Origen, and Athanasius². The same method was used after him up to recent times³. And there is no denying that the great Alexandrian Origen played a decisive role in determining the future of the Canticle's interpretation, by setting a monumental precedent in his work of the canonical book. We shall have the occasion to compare his work with that of Gregory of Nyssa himself in Chapter eleven, but suffice it to say that the two works have more differences than have similarities. Gregory employed the same allegorical method and even follow some of the ways of interpreting the symbolisms in the Song, but the overall results are so

different that we can safely say that each has left a different path in his trail in the mystical tradition of the Christian Church⁴.

The Song of Songs has always been popular as a text for allegorical interpretation for the following reasons:

- i. The text itself provides an extraordinarily rich ground for elaboration of allegory, hidden truths can be perceived.
- ii. The prevailing use of the imagery of the book in liturgy helps to propagate this type of interpretation.
- iii. The ease with which to relate the imagery of marriage and the bride/bridegroom are both attested in other Old and New Testament texts such as Hosea, Jeremiah and Ephesians.
- iv. The belief that human affairs are but a reflection of the ultimate spiritual reality sees intimate human love as a reflection of union in divine- human love.
- v. The erotic expression of love is never emphasized in all other texts of the scriptures, and if mentioned at all, it is almost always presented in a bad light of adultery and unfaithfulness. So it seems logical to the users of allegorical interpretation to find a deeper meaning in the text.
- vi. The Scriptures must be interpreted in accordance to the rule of faith and this admits of spiritual or allegorical interpretation as Scripture itself uses allegory. And the allegorical interpreters always make sure that their arguments are supported by doctrine.

In an attack on the use of allegory by the Church Fathers, R.P.C. Hanson dismissively says, " No admiration of the beauty or skill displayed in their typological and allegorical interpretation should be allowed to disguise the distorting effect which these ideas had upon their understanding of the Bible"⁵, and adds that " undoubtedly Christian exegetes surrendered much too readily to the seduction of the enchantress Allegory who promised them an intoxicating freedom"⁶. By this freedom he means the wanton and fantastic ways in which the Fathers took liberty in approaching the sacred texts to achieve their preconceived ends. Perhaps his position is made even clearer in the words of Arnobius, writing in the fourth century, attacking pagan allegorisation, which Hanson quotes,

" How are we to know that these (passages) are to be allegorised? Why should we accept this interpretation? Do you know the intention of the authors of these stories better than they knew it themselves? ... This is an ingenious evasion but obvious to any fool."⁷

But it is above all to be remembered that, as Scheper reminds us, "the Song is understood spiritually prior to and independently of any theory of the multiple senses of Scripture, for the Song is understood to speak *immediately*, albeit figuratively, of Christ and the Church - the spiritual sense is its literal, not its typological, meaning - and it is this fact that makes the

'allegorical interpretation' of the Song no problem even for the most anti-allegorical Reformation exegetes"⁸.

Gregory of Nyssa agrees with the reasons above, but what makes his interpretation unique are the following:

- a. Whereas most, if not all, other interpretations concentrate on the love and union between the Divine and the Human, be it God/ Israel; God/New Israel (church); God(Christ)/human soul, Gregory of Nyssa concentrates on the *progress* of such love and union.
- b. Allegory might be positively valued as "a kind of artistic form, capable of suggesting and expressing fresh connections of thoughts"⁹. Here lies the way of reading Gregory's homilies on the Song of Songs: there is a progression in thought of the human person's nature and destiny as we progress through the text and interpretation, forming a fairly coherent concept of Gregory's mystical anthropology.

There is always a close link between Gregory's theology and his method of interpretation of Scripture. And this was particularly prominent in his mystical anthropology, especially when he formulates it through the use of allegory.

5.1 THE VALUE OF ALLEGORY

Gregory's understanding of Scripture can be summed up in St. Paul's words, "If anyone thinks he knows anything, he does not yet know as he ought"¹⁰. As A.A. Mosshammer points out, "The Bible is not the revelation of God as God is in his unchangeable nature, but of God as he relates to an

ever-changing world and especially, to the reader as a being caught up in that mobility"¹¹. The elusive meaning of the Bible comes to be understood by the reader in the capacity of the property of man in his mobility, thus interpretation of the Bible is closely linked with anthropological theory of man as changeable being. Just like the pursuit of man for his destiny in perfection and union with the truth, Biblical interpretation is also "an infinite pursuit of what must forever remain absent"¹². Mosshammer summarizes Gregory's understanding of theological language succinctly thus:

"[Gregory] argues, first, that language is a human invention and therefore both arbitrary and fallible, so that the ability of language to express any reality whatsoever in its own essence is questionable. Second, he maintains that language is bound to an order of reality so entirely unlike the divine nature that words cannot even inadequately address the being of God. Third, Gregory argues that all apparently theological language, including the language of the Bible, can in fact have only the created order as its referent. Finally, Gregory claims that to the theological language expresses divine truths at all such language can have no fixed content, but must forever be reinterpreted in an endless pursuit of an ever elusive meaning."¹³

Gregory insists that language is a human invention, and that naming of things is just an arbitrary association of signs according to established conventions, conception (ἐπινοῖα) and language are means to apprehend indirectly the intelligible realities¹⁴ multiplicity of words are required to express the object of enquiry, but none can exhaust the nature of things.¹⁵

"All language is a form of conversation, a striving towards reality, rather than a representational picture of reality."¹⁶ This has important consequences when he comes to interpret Scripture allegorically, the

striving towards reality is the task of the exegete and the form that the text of scripture takes cannot be the soul reality but "a striving towards the reality of the intelligible and the realm beyond the senses. As we shall see this theory of language serves his mystical anthropology well in providing a methodology not only of exegesis of the Biblical text but becomes the basis for the methodology in formulating his mystical anthropology.

Because language is a human invention, it can only belong to the realm of the created. The distinction between the created and the uncreated then comes into play.¹⁷ The human intellect is confined to the created order¹⁸ therefore whatever is speculated by the human mind, in this case the language, is also confined to the created order and may not pass the boundary that separates it from the uncreated,¹⁹ so much so that even the incorporeal, angelic nature cannot cross that boundary.²⁰ But language belongs to man in contrast to other corporeal creatures (like stones and irrational animals) because only man is a mixture of the intellectual and bodily natures. "Thus language arises because of a structure of difference within the human nature itself ... Mind and body are different orders of reality that cannot interact with one another directly. Language mediates between the two." This difference is the inherent διατήμα in human nature.

This διατήμα as we have seen ²¹ is the distinguishing mark between the Created and Uncreated nature; not as a matter of degree but of kind, the presence in the created

on the one hand and the absence in the Uncreated in the other. Since rational discourse and the invention of language belongs to the created

διὰ τῆς φύσεως, they cannot comprehend nor speak of the divine nature, therefore all language, including theological language, must have the created order as its referent point if it is to have any meaning at all.²²

But lest this leads to despair of ever knowing the divine, Gregory speaks of the knowledge of God through his "energies" in the world.²³ What cannot be known, the essence of God, at least could be perceived, albeit incompletely, in his energies, yet not just through the silent way of existential mysteries of natural theology, but through God's own condescension to speak in human terms via the Scriptures. Scripture represents the Word of God, but since all language is bounded by the created διαστήμα, and God does not speak directly, Scripture then speaks of God but not his essence. But this is enough to spur the rational mind on to perceive what cannot be contained, to describe what in fact cannot be described, "the purpose of the Bible is to lead the reader through the writer's words, not back to the original experience of inspiration, but forward to the recreation of a similar experience in himself"²⁴. Thus when the Lord himself says "I and the Father are One", he uses "Father" and "Son" in human usage so that it conjures up in the human mind the identity of essence in the divine²⁵, he is transported to the realm beyond himself, just like what St. Paul found in the third heaven, there is no language to express the divine mysteries, but every expression is only another step on an endless course.²⁶

Gregory did not finish his interpretation of the Song of Songs, some of the reasons put forward include the postulation that the Origenist

controversy was looming and it was not expedient to continue with this line of interpretation, especially because Gregory held to the Origenist doctrine of apokatastasis. But this would ignore the *De Vita Moysis*, which came later than the Song of Songs commentary in date. Perhaps it is just as natural to the flow of Gregory's thought on the eternal progress that he left the commentary unfinished as another witness to this unending quest.

5.2 THE INCARNATION AS MODEL FOR INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

Allegory involves types and their archetype and in the biblical-allegorical interpretation this means that the integrity of doctrine is only secured by keeping the archetypes in their proper order.²⁷ With the advent of Christianity, it is hardly surprising that they are summed up in Christ and be shown to sum up in Christ. For the Fathers, Christ was the key for the restoration of order, and in him, human experience finds its meaning. Interpretation of Scripture for the Fathers means that the underlying assumption is "that God so orders events that the facts of salvation history can become the image of our experience of God" and allegory "is an interpretative commentary on events and beliefs which can make them part of a cosmic whole and thereby give coherence to the Bible".²⁸ For Gregory of Nyssa, the summation in Christ of all Christian interpretation of scripture goes further than most. The letter of Scripture must blend with the Word of God himself. He thinks in terms not of spiritual displacing the natural, but natural reflecting the spiritual,²⁹ the essence of which is the

mirror image of the event of the Incarnation of Christ, the Son of God.

In the fourth and the thirteenth Homily, Gregory links his concept of the Incarnation with the view of Scripture that makes its allegorical interpretation both valid and necessary. First the mystery of the Incarnation is such that the covering of his human body "shadows" over the ray of his divinity, and the human nature and the divine nature blend in the person of the Incarnate Christ. [J108.1-10 and J109.1-3] What makes it interesting for the notion of Biblical interpretation is the comment on the "overshadowing": "For unless you 'shaded yourself over' with the form of a servant while unveiling the pure rays of your divinity, who could bear your manifestation?" [J108.1-3] Indeed no one can bear the pure rays of divinity and live. Therefore his human body acted as a *mediator* of the light for us. [J108.9-10] The mediation of the seen for the unseen is the precise nature of language. Since Scripture has the double identity of the words of man and the Word of God, it is the blending of two "nature" of the sort described of the Incarnation of Christ. In the words of Mosshammer, "Scripture is indeed inspired and does represent the condescension of God. Scripture is the incarnation of the Word of God as words of man, just as Christ is the incarnation of the Word of God as flesh of man. The man Christ reveals the fullness of God in finite form, and the text of the Bible is likewise representation of the divine mystery".³⁰

In Homily thirteen, Gregory actually links the scriptural interpretation with the Incarnation. [J380.16 - J381.10] Just as scripture reveals what is the mystery of God in its content, so the Incarnation reveals

the glory of God. Scripture proves the reality of the Incarnation in John 1:3, when it says that "He was always with God and the Word was uncreated, without whom nothing was made". [J381.1-3] But he appeared in human flesh precisely to manifest "the glory as the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth".³¹ The Incarnation in turn proves the words of man can also be called the divine words precisely because it reveals this glory and this mystery.

But just as Christ is "uncreated and before all the ages, eternally incomprehensible, and totally ineffable, that which appeared to us through the flesh allowed something of him to be known". [J381.10-14] The Church sees in the Scripture this great mystery of our religion, and explains it at best she can to her listeners [J381.15-21], trying to express the inexpressible through human words.

In the first homily, Gregory uses the imagery of painting to validate his particular view of the interpretation of Scripture. [J28.7-23] In the art of painting, the artist utilizes different colours to represent the subject he portrays. It would be ludicrous to appreciate the portrait by picking out individual colours used, the image created by the skillful artist is such that all the colours used blended harmoniously to form a coherent portrayal of the subject. So it is with the finite body of the scriptural text. The words in the text of the Song of Songs forms a veil of the fullness within, just like the flesh of Christ is the veil of the Word. "One cannot strip away the veil to reveal what is underneath, for flesh and spirit are a composite unity. The one cannot live without the other. God speaks by means of the veil of

written text and human language - not in spite of it."³² So there is no way we can perceive the terms blessedness, detachment, union with God, alienation from evil and likeness to what is truly beautiful and good without the text of the Song of Songs which mentions mouth, kiss, myrrh, wine, bodily limbs, bed, maidens and so forth. [J28.15-23] What can be more, Gregory observes, "paradoxical than to make nature purify itself of its own passions and teach detachment in words normally suggesting passions".[J28] But this is precisely what Solomon does in the Song of Songs: "he disposes the soul to be attentive to purify through words which seem to indicate the complete opposite and he indicates a pure meaning through the use of sensuous language."

The Incarnation becomes the model for this interpretation in the sense that Christ has to come in the flesh in order to reveal the glory of the divine, so the text of human words must exist in order to reveal that glory, yet not any text, but Scripture, the Word of God. The spiritual is embodied in the literal.

5.3 THE INFINITE PROCESS OF INTERPRETATION & EPEKTASIS

The Eunomian controversy brings out a surprising fruit for Gregory: the investigation into the nature of language. God cannot be contained in just one name.³³ Even a multiplicity of words cannot exhaust the nature of the object of inquiry, which is God. But the reverse is also true. Since God is one, and language used to clothed this divinity is multiple and sequential, it implies that there is no one final interpretation

of Scripture, "since the structure of language is different, meaning and interpretation must be multiple, caught up in an unending process of interpretation in which each successive understanding undermines itself so as to point forward to another".³⁴

The Scripture, being the mediation between the divine and the human, but still in the realm of διαστήμα, thus composed in multiplicity of language, nevertheless teaches the unity of God. The divine is unspeakable, therefore Scripture cannot adequately use 'one notion in speaking of God, therefore many analogies lead to the one truth. In expressing the divine essence in apophatic terminology, inaccessible, intangible and incomprehensible [J89], Gregory nevertheless says that, "whichever expression we take, one idea is common to all, namely, that from the virtues we obtain knowledge of the good which transcends all understanding just as the beauty of an archetype can be inferred from its image" [J90.18 - J91.4].

This is not to mean that this multiplicity of expression culminates into a full expression of the divine, but just the reverse is true, the multiplicity of expression serves to show the fact that the quest is for that which is forever remains hidden³⁵, all we can say is that the multiplicity of expression or interpretation serves to spur us on to the desire to know more of the unknowable by revealing fragments of his true glory resulting in an ending quest. So already in his theory of the nature of language, Gregory formulates it in terms which he will use for the ascent of man to perfection and union with God as the process of epektasis. In a classic

passage linking scripture and the spiritual quest, Gregory points to the bride's ascent through her understanding of the process of scriptural guidance:

"We now see the bride being led by the Word up a rising staircase by the steps of virtue to the heights of perfection. First the Word sends her a ray of light through the windows of the prophets and the lattices of Law. He exhorts her to draw near to the light and to become beautiful by being transformed into the dove's image in the light ..." [J158.15 - J159.4]

Books of the Bible, including the Psalms, Ecclesiastes, the Beatitudes and of course the Song of Songs are unfolded for the reader, through their literary sequence, a spiritual akolouthia that leads to ever higher contemplation of the divine mysteries.³⁶ But Scripture teaches, if not anything else, that the divine mystery is such that the Uncreated nature is known by its inability to be known³⁷, so perception is void in face of this mystery. It is like Moses entering the darkness where God is, the inadequacy of all created understanding also applies to the understanding of Scripture.³⁸

The very fact that Gregory formulates his doctrine of *epektasis* based on the Pauline scriptural passage itself points towards its relationship with the process of interpretation.³⁹ Scripture is like the air we breathe, each of us breath in an appropriate amount yet the air is undiminished.⁴⁰ So the reader of Scripture receives the teaching of Scripture according to his own measure of spirituality, as the creature is in constant change or flux, each interpretation is different from the last, every interpretation in the progress of the creature is but the beginning of further interpretation.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. See R. E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs: a Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), pp.11-41 for a concise history of the interpretation of The Song of Songs from the earliest known source to the present era; see also *Idem.*, " Patristic and Medieval Exegesis- Help or Hindrance? " CBQ 43 (1981) 505-16; *Idem.*, " History of Exegesis as a Hermeneutical Tool: The Song of Songs " BTB 16 (1986) 87-91. For more detailed history see M. H. Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 7; Garden City: Doubleday,1977) and G. L. Scheper, *The Spiritual Marriage: The Exegetic History and Literary Impact of the Song Of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ph.D. dissertation; Princeton University, 1971); E. A. Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song Of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press,1990) pp.3-150.
2. The earliest extant Christian work on the Song of Songs that is known was that by Hippolytus of Rome, preserved only in fragments. (see e.g, G. N. Bonwetsch and H. Achelis, eds., *Hippolytus Werke, Vol. 1: Hippolytus Kommentar zum Buche Daniel und die Fragmente des Kommentars zum Hohenliede* (GCS: Leipzig:J. C.Hinrichs, 1897) Murphy's comment is relevant, " Nowhere does Hippolytus discuss allegory per se, yet his method of interpreting the Song is the first manifestation of a Christian allegorizing tradition which comes to classical expression in the work of Origen and his medieval successors " (*Commentary* op.cit., p.15).
3. Allegorical interpretation of scriptural texts has fallen into disrepute, the opponents of such method think that there is in it too much speculation and arbitrariness, but recently, the advent of the literal reading of texts has again opened up the discussion of this particular type of interpretation as a valid method, proponents include F.M. Young, A. Louth et al. See F. Young, "Allegory and the Ethics of Reading" in F. Watson ed., *The Open Text: New Direction for Biblical Studies?* (London: SCM Press 1993) pp. 103-20; A. Louth, *Discerning the Mystery*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1983). See also M. Ford, "Towards the Restoration of Allegory: Christology, Epistemology and Narrative Structure," SVTQ 34(1990), 161-195.
4. There is always a interplay between Scriptural interpretation and theological understanding. In both the Fathers' works they are intertwined, but the allegorical method served both of them well, as both them held to the Platonic worldview, but this is to

anticipate one of our conclusions in these thesis.

5. R.P.C. Hanson, "Biblical Exegesis in the Early Church", in P.R. Ackroyd and C.F. Evans (ed). *The Cambridge History of the Bible: From the Beginnings to Jerome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1970) p.422.
6. Ibid., p.449.
7. Ibid., p.429, *Adv. Nat.* v,33 and 36.
8. Scheper, op.cit. p.377.
9. C. W. Macleod, " Allegory and Mysticism in Origen and Gregory of Nyssa" *JTS,NS* (XXII) 1971, p.376.
10. Cf. Homily eleven, J320.20
11. A.A. Mosshammer, "Disclosing but not Disclosed: Gregory of Nyssa as Deconstructionist," in *Studien zu Gregor von Nyssa Und Der Christlichen Spatantike* ed. H.R. Drobner & C. Klock, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), p.99.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid, p.100. The nature of theological language is formulated by Gregory in his intense battle with Eunomius concerning his use of the name ungeneracy as representing the divine essence.
14. CE II 572-575 GNO I 393.17-394.12.
15. CE II, 280-283 GNO I 309.1-310.2
16. Mosshammer, op.cit.p.102; cf. CE II, 575 GNO I 394.6-12.
17. See Chapter one, *passim*
18. CE I 369 GNO I 136.1-7.
19. Cf. Mosshammer, op.cit. p.103.
20. Cf. CE I 683, GNO I 222.18-25; *De vita Moysis* GNO VII.I. 87.9-13, thus confirming that the sharpest distinction is between the Uncreated and Created and not between the intelligible and the sensible.
21. Cf. Chapter one, *passim*.
22. Cf. Mosshammer, op.cit., p.108

23. CE II 583 (GNO I 396.16-27); beat 6 PG 44.1269A; Eccle 7, GNO v.415.19; Cant 11 (J335.13-15)
24. Mosshammer, op.cit. p.110.
25. CE III.I. 99 GNO II 312.12-313.24.
26. Cant 8 J245.11-J246.12.
27. Cf. H.A. Blair, "Allegory, Typology and Archetypes", 263-267.
28. G. Bostock, "Allegory and the Interpretation of the Bible in Origen," JLT 1(1987); 41.
29. J.B. Cahill, "The Date and Setting of Gregory of Nyssa's Commentary on the Song of Songs," JTS 32(1979), 460; cf. C.S. Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, (London:SCM 1936), p.225, "It is a mischievous error to suppose that in an allegory, the author is 'really' talking about the thing symbolized and not at all about the thing that symbolises, the very essence of the art is to talk about both."
30. Mosshammer, op.cit. pp.110-111.
31. Cf. John 1:14
32. Mosshammer, op.cit. p.113.
33. For Eunomius the divine essence can be perceived in his name, unregeneracy. See discussion by Muhlenburg, Die Unendlichkeit Gottes bei Gregor von Nyssa, (Gottingen:Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1966). Eunomius' theory of language can be found in his *Apologia Apologiae II*. cf. CE II, GNO I, 281-347.
34. Mosshammer, op.cit. p.113, see CEII 477 GNO I, 365.15-22.
35. Cf. CE II 475 GNO I, 365.1-8
36. See eg. Insc Ps 1,7 (GNO V, 43.13-18) Eccl 5 GNO V 353.11-13; Beat 2 PG 44.1208 GD; for the Song of Songs J17.
37. Eccl 7 GNO V.411.6-14.
38. Cf. Eccl. 2.7 GNO V 302.1 - 303.6; 416.1-5.
39. See J174.1-20
40. Cf. Beat 7 PG 44.1280A.

CHAPTER SIX

MYSTICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE INCARNATION

Gregory, in his dispute with heresy and pagan philosophy, is always acutely aware of the problem of his own distinctive Christian contribution, how it differs from other philosophies, and why it must play the ultimate role in his theology. Balthasar's general comment about Christianity can be aptly applied to Gregory's awareness: "Now Christianity brings to religious philosophy a complete reversal of its point of departure. It is no longer a question of knowing how the soul can approach God but learning how, indeed, God has approached us."¹ This awareness admittedly is not prominent in Gregory's earlier works, he is very much preoccupied in formulating Christian anthropology in the context of pagan philosophy, and his rhetorical training assists him in so doing, so much so that we can almost say his Christian thinking is almost overshadowed by his philosophical speculation.

De hominis Opificio formulates the theology of the Image of God in man in terms of Neo-platonic understanding of the origin and nature of the soul. F.M. Young expresses her puzzle in Gregory's treatise which treats of the destiny of man, but scarcely mentions his atonement and Christological importance, "Oddly, fall and restoration are not related to Christological states or to a doctrine of atonement. Christ never appears as 'proper man'. The cross is only mentioned because it confirms scriptural predictions; or because it heightens the miracle of Christ's resurrection and reinforces the

proof that scripture is reliable when it predicts the resurrection of mankind."² And in the *De anima et resurrectione*, Gregory attempts to place Christian anthropology solidly in platonic context. It is only when he speaks to a specifically Christian audience that the Christian distinctiveness emerges and overshadows his philosophical speculation. Thus *Oratio Cathedra*, speaks to Catechists and we see Gregory answering theological questions using overtly Christian thoughts, the Incarnation becomes the basis for the work.

Already in the *De Perfecta Christiani Forma* the role of Christ becomes more and more prominent in man's salvation and divinisation, "The incomprehensible and ineffable Word became the image of the Invisible God through love for man that you might be formed by His form which He assumed and through Him be again fashioned according to the character of the archetypal beauty to become what you were from the beginning."³

And it is in *In Canticum Canticorum* that we see his mature thought emerging. All previous philosophical speculations are not abandoned, but forms the basis for his formulation of the ascent of the soul, but Christian distinctiveness holds sway to the whole work. The fact of "the God that approached us" in Grace is explored to the full, as we have observed above, but central to all these distinctiveness is the fact of the Incarnation.

In the *Oratio Catechetica* Gregory of Nyssa takes pain in deliberating on the fact of the Incarnation, answering the stock objections concerning its doctrine. In Or.Cat. 24, he attempts a summary of his doctrine, thus" the

Incarnation is a manifestation of God's goodness, wisdom, justice, power and incorruptible nature, for man and his salvation. His goodness is evident in his choosing to save one who was lost. His wisdom and justice are to be seen in the way he served us. His power is clear in this: that he came in the likeness of man and in the lowly form of our native, inspiring the hope that, like man, he could be overcome by death; and yet, having come, he acted entirely in accordance with his nature."⁴

The mechanics of the Incarnation, the why and the how of God taking human form, is mentioned in several of his works, and the divinization of man in Christ is also mentioned in conjunction with the redemptive work of Christ. In *Oratio Catechetica*, for example,⁵ he sees God as united to us humans in two ways: in one case he is united to us in so far as all things depend on him, and exist in him and he exists in all things, sustaining all existing things; and in another case, "he united himself with our nature, in order that by its union with the Divine it might become divine, being rescued from death and freed from the tyranny of the adversary. For with his return from death, our mortal race begins its return to immortal life."⁶ The link between divinization and Incarnation is obvious here, but none so explicit as in his mature works on the mystical ascent of man to "the immortal life". In *Canticum Canticorum* explores this relationship more fully.

It is obvious that the man Christ is of paramount importance to Gregory's formulation of mystical anthropology, because he is the true image of God and man is also the image, a reflected glory of the true image;

and the fact that the Incarnation involves divinity blending with humanity means that anthropology can be viewed from the perspective of divinization as redemption.

6.1 CHRIST AND SOLOMON

In the *In Canticum Canticorum*, Gregory loses no time in identifying Solomon the author of the written word with Christ, the true Word of God. That Solomon is the type of Christ is agreed upon by all allegorical authors of the interpretation of the Song of Songs. Solomon has the added advantage of having a triple identity:⁷ that of "the Son of David", which is also used for the title for Jesus of Nazareth; that of "the man of wisdom" is but a derived earthly equivalent of the Wisdom of God, who is the Son Incarnate, and that of "the Son of peace" speaks of the One that was born in the city of Peace, who is himself "Peace" born on earth for the Father's good pleasure.⁸ Two other things about Solomon makes their way into Gregory's emphasis on Solomon as the type of Christ. In Homily seven, the earthly Solomon built his temple, but Christ builds his spiritual church on earth. Solomon builds his litter to sit on just as Christ builds his Church as the throne of God. And Solomon's wisdom was so well-known far and wide that the Queen of Ethiopia came to visit him [J201.7], the allegorical equivalent is the Gentiles' journey into the Church of Christ. [J201.1-12] Thus what Solomon did in his life time is the type of the ministry of the Incarnate Christ on earth: the institution of his Church and the gathering

in of mankind into his Church.

If then Solomon wrote his three canonical books, and with the Song of Songs, showing us "the ascent to perfection in an orderly fashion" [J17.4-12; H1.4], then the Christ, of whom Solomon is the type, all the more, leads man with his Incarnation to the ascent.

6.2 THE INCARNATION AND DIVINISATION

As we have pointed out in Chapter two, the exposition of the nature and destiny or the restoration of man starts with Homily Two, where the existential predicament of human nature in the world is expounded. The realization of that predicament as sin brings the human soul face to face with his own fate. Like the prodigal son in the Gospel who realizes the depth of his degradation and who finally turns his mind to return to his father's house, the soul receives the transforming grace of Christ and turns from darkness to light [J48.6-24]. This grace, Christ shows by laying down his life for the sheep [J61.11-12], i.e. by coming in the flesh to redeem mankind. The recognition sets the soul on its path to restoration.

This path of restoration at first seems elusive as the soul is given only a glimpse of his original glory by first of all purifying itself and then by seeing its archetype in the glory of Christ. This is all "exteriorized", until such time when the soul prepared itself to receive the divine indwelling, by faith and by imitating Christ. It is at such time that the theme of Incarnation is introduced.⁹ All persons are in various degrees of maturity

in Christ, but all can wait for the full glory to be like him "who manifested himself raised upon a cross of wood and whose blood is drink and salvation for persons who are saved and rejoiced in him." [J98.15-99.1] This anticipates the fourth homily which concentrates on the Christological and anthropological themes and how they are related.

In Homily Four, Gregory seems to be quite content to place the passage on the Incarnation in accordance with the flow of the Cantic text. Thus in the middle of describing the beauty of the purified soul [J106], he proceeds immediately to describe the Bridegroom as "overshadowed our bed". But this is in fact a demonstration of Gregory's concept of *akolouthia*¹⁰. The sequence is both a feature in Gregory's exposition of Scripture and a necessary one, for his formulation of the soul's ascent. If indeed this is Gregory's way of allegory, then it is not doing any violence to Gregory's work itself if we seek to find some harmonious or coherent structure in his allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs.

A full analysis is done in Chapter two, 2.4.4-8. Here we will try to assimilate the structure of the ascent of the soul through the Incarnation with the rest of the Homilies, in so doing, discover a richer nuance to this relationship.

It is no doubt that the three stages of man's understanding of the Incarnation is important for Gregory's mystical anthropology. The idea is evident throughout his Homilies: forming the basis for the ascent to perfection and union with God. The case in point is the interesting way in which Gregory treats the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Two sets of ideas

are expounded, both related to the theme of Incarnation and divinization.¹¹

In Homily Fourteen, it was mankind who travels the road to Jericho, a "descent from heaven" [J427.10] which in Gregory's anthropological terminology is man fallen from his original state. "The ambush of robbers" is the equivalent of Homily two's, "The son of my mother have fought in me" leaving the soul to abandon its own vineyard;¹² here in Homily Fourteen, the stark reality of sin and the state of fallenness is described as "the removal of the garment of incorruptibility, sin's wound and the progress of sin over half of man's nature while the soul remained immortal." [J427.11-13] The old dispensation of the Law and sacrifice could not heal or take away sin, as the Levites and Priests passed by without lifting a hand to help, hence "the passing by of the Law which was of no avail. [J427.13-14] It was the Incarnation that brings the whole situation around. Thus it was Christ, "who rose from Judah to become our brother". [J427:5-6] With his body he healed mankind, and made for them "his loving providence a resting place in which all those who labour and are burdened can rest. Whoever enters him receives him. [J428.5-8]

The interesting thing about Homily Fifteen's exposition of the Good Samaritan is that both the protagonists ^{are} ~~is~~ Christ. It can hardly be said that Gregory overlooks his own exposition just a homily before, but to all purpose of mystical anthropology, this is a deliberate gesture of identifying the mechanics of Incarnation and divinization as described in Homily Four.

We can see in Homily Fifteen what we term "the Process of Indwelling".¹³ in answering the maiden's query of the whereabouts of the

Beloved, the Bride claims that he "has gone down to his garden". (Canticle 6:2) This is the going down from Jerusalem to Jericho in the Parable. But this time it was Christ who was the victim who fell among robbers, "which signifies his descent from his ineffable majesty to the humility of our human nature". [J436.14-16] By coming down to the garden of human nature, which was once perfect but was devastated, "so God came down again to adorn the garden with the plants of virtues." [J437.4-5] This descent is of course the indwelling of the soul. Just as the ineffable Lord descend to the humility of human nature, he also indwells the virtuous soul. Christ not only comes to heal the victim but becomes first as the victim himself, and then by the same mechanics in which he imparts divinity on his humanity, so the healing of the soul by the "wounded healer" came by the same process, imparting truth, righteousness, honour, blessedness, holiness and virtue on the soul. [J438.18-20] Thus the process of divinization is assured by the fact of the Incarnation.

The path^{of} mystical experience can become the accusation it attracts: pure expression of more or less delirious subjectivity. If this experience authorises itself by rejecting the otherness of the one of whom it speaks, it risks speaking of nothing but itself and the subjectivity which conveys it. But Gregory takes steps in guiding the seekers into the truth of this mystical experience, which form the dynamic essence of his anthropology, it cannot remain in its purely philosophical and theological description of why and what constitute a man, his origin and his destiny, he is more interested in how man can get from his origin to his destiny. The experience

of the indwelling Christ becomes paramount, because here is the essence of the transforming process from origin in sin to destiny in union with him.

But in order to be an authentic Christian experience as against neo-platonic ascent of the soul, there cannot be anything other, or more, in mystical journey than has already been given in Christ, and thus the Incarnation becomes the *so/e* criterion in validating this ascent as Christian. It is Christ who authorizes, by Incarnation, and authenticates it, by indwelling in man in order to divinise him.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX.

1. Balthasar, *Présence*, op.cit., p.133.
2. F.M. Young, *Adam*, art.cit. 117.
3. *De Perfecta christiani Forma*, PG 46.270D.
4. C.C. Richardson's translation, 301-302.
5. Or.Cat. 25.
6. Richardson's translation, 302.
7. See Chapter two, 2.1.2.
8. See Chapter four, 4.5.6.
9. See Chapter two, 2.3.6.
10. We will explore this concept briefly in Chapter seven below.
11. They are to be found in Homilies fourteen and fifteen..
12. See Chapter Two, 2.2.3 for fuller exposition.
13. Chapter four, 4.5.2.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MYSTICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND AKOLOUTHIA

In *De Hominis Opificio*, Gregory sets up his method of interpreting scripture thus:

"But even in those things regarding man that seem to be opposed to each other through the dissimilarity between what came to be in the beginning and what is now to be seen, through a kind of necessary sequence (akolouthia), it is necessary to weave together the explanations of Scripture and the notions discovered by our own reasonings, in order to construct one account which has consistency and order (akolouthia) in relation to what appears to be opposed to each other, and which brings these apparent contradictions to one single end."¹

The overpowering purpose is the order of ideas and the consistency which be called to bare on any Scriptural interpretation. As scripture is God's revelation, and God is without confusion, it is "logical" to induce that Scriptural records pertaining to a systematic idea in theology must have order (akolouthia) and all apparent contradictions must be ironed out by our own reasonings.

With the anthropological formulation, the obvious apparent contradiction lies in "what came to be in the beginning", when man acquired the image of God and thus is immortal, infinite and holy etc. and "what is now to be seen", when man becomes mortal, feeble, and sinful. Scripture presents both these two conditions in different texts, and it is up to the theologian to "draw our attention to the whole sequence of reality in a systematic manner, i.e. what happened in the beginning, what is to take place in the end, and what is happening in between".²

But it is in Gregory's commentary on the titles of the Psalms, *In Inscriptiões Psalmorum*³ that we find Gregory links the notion of *akolouthia* (sequence) with allegorical interpretation. Even the arrangement of the Bible exudes with significance for life itself. The traditional five divisions of the book of Psalms are meant to be understood as increasing sequence and order corresponding to five stages of the life of advancing towards the perfection of God.⁴

Sequence is important in his mystical writing. The stages of upward advancement depend in each stage on the previous one:

"In the five divisions of the Psalms then we understand a sequence (*akolouthia*) as if a series of steps standing one above the other in a certain order which is consecutive, signifying thereby that the last sound of each division has the meaning of some sort of station or stopping place in the discourse, comprehending in itself the ends of the stages previously traversed."⁵

Thus, "the first psalm refers to the beginning of the life of virtue, which means separation from the life of evil. From there, by stages the soul is led to the summit of perfection" (ἀνάβασις πρὸς τὸ ἀκρότατον τοῦ μακαρισμοῦ)⁶ until the final triumphant doxology when the good overcomes evil.⁷

The central meaning of *akolouthia* is for Gregory, confined to the created order and not to the Creator. In the created order it is possible to find order and sequence and know things in terms of their mutual relationship. In the controversy with Eunomius, Gregory emphatically rejects this exists in the Creator.⁸ Mutual relationship in the created order is also evident in Scripture itself, and if it is interpreted according to the

scheme of ascent, then this order or sequence becomes important in relating the text of Scripture on the one hand and the message of ascent on the other. If, for example, in *In Canticum Canticorum*, Gregory maintains that Solomon "speaks in the philosophy set forth in the Song of Songs and shows us the ascent to perfection in an orderly fashion (τάξις)" [J17.10-12], then the ascent to perfection must be linked with the sequential order of the text of the Song of Songs, the inner sequence of cause and effect is then evident in both the text and the spiritual implication in its progress from beginning to a satisfactory ending.⁹ In fact as Shea puts it, Gregory attempts, "always to draw things together into a higher unity, we mean that his approach is always to the totality, to the whole and the relation of the parts to the whole, as well as vice-versa".¹⁰

A.A. Mosshammer points out that Gregory's changing view of man from his earlier works to the later more mature works.¹¹ A. Meredith in his investigation of the idea of God in Gregory casts doubt on the method of selecting a particular feature as the principal or salient feature as Gregory of Nyssa's theological system.¹² Already in his investigation of the idea of "God" in *De Virginitate*, Gregory presents a God that is *difficult* to know rather than a God who is clouded in absolute mysteriousness and impossible to know in his later work of *De Vita Moysis*.¹³ The idea of the divine is cast in Platonic mould of Beauty and Goodness.¹⁴ In Chapter 11 of *De Virginitate* for example the possibility of union and knowledge seems remote but not totally unreachable, "it has been proved as well that this union of the soul with the incorruptible Deity can be accomplished in no

other way but by herself attaining by her Virgin state to the uttermost purity possible - a state which, being like God, will enable her to grasp that to which it is like, while she places herself like a mirror beneath the purity of God, and molds her own beauty at the touch and the sight of the Archetype of all beauty".¹⁵ This is in marked contrast with his almost despairing but a unique formulation of eternal progress in his later mystical works especially in *De vita Moysis* and *In Canticum Canticorum*, a distinct move away from Platonic vision of God and comes into his own.

Meredith's musing over this change is interesting, "Is the difference between these two professedly spiritual treatises simply traceable to the fact that the subject matter of the two imposes different ideas of God upon the author or has a growing awareness of the mysteriousness of God, for other reasons, led Gregory to modify the picture of human growth?"¹⁶ We certainly find the latter to be true in Gregory's anthropology. The move from light to darkness parallels man's gradual awareness of his lot (as created) and this makes two things starkly apparent: the necessity of abandoning the normal way of seeking knowledge, by sense perception, and the abhorrence of anything that will hinder this progress without sense, and this of course results in the curbing of passions in the body which tend to drag down that growth.

The path of Abraham is the case in point. In the *Contra Eunomium*¹⁷ Abraham's journey of faith is interpreted allegorically. Abraham's migration is seen as the quest of the knowledge of God. "By going out of his native land, that is, out of himself, out of the realm of base

and earthly thoughts, Abraham raised his mind as far as possible above the common limits of our human nature and abandoned the association which the soul have with the senses."¹⁸ Abraham walks by faith not by sight. He went beyond that which can be perceived by the senses, "and from the beauty that he saw around him ... he gained a yearning to gaze upon the archetypal Beauty".¹⁹ As he advanced in thought, he relied on what he had already found, and stretch forth to the things that were before.

Harrison²⁰ sees Abraham's experience, as described by Gregory, to be inadequate spirituality without supporting texts from his other writings. Here the overriding concern is to emphasize the incomprehensibility of the divine essence.²¹ More likely, we can see a progress in thought even here in his mystical contemplation in anthropological context and developed into mature doctrine of eternal progress in his later works especially in the Commentary to the Song of Songs. But the basic mold of that spiritual journey is already cast here.

C.W.Macleod points out that, "allegory is the attempt to find a structure and a sequence in the texts that Gregory deals with".²² When this is applied to *De vita Moysis* for example, we find an interesting result: Gregory in fact freely handles the text of Exodus and Numbers, and analyses them in such a way as to give a coherent picture of the souls ascend to perfection, sometimes reversing the sequence of the story of Moses, sometimes even flatly contradict the biblical texts. "One thing follows another in his life, but the concern is not with logical connection but with progress, not with Chronology but with sequence. The stages of Moses'

life are a pattern, not in their order, but in their demonstration that the life of virtue is a constant advance to new things. Perfection in virtue is to be always making progress in virtue."²³

If indeed this is Gregory's way of allegory, then it is not doing any violent ~~to~~ to Gregory himself if we seek to find some harmonious or coherent structure in his allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs. And this is one of the main theme of our analysis: that Gregory sees a sequence (akolouthia) in the arrangement of the canonical text of the Canticle and utilizes this to find a coherent structure in his formulation of the thesis of the ascent of the soul to perfect as his mystical anthropological theme.

We shall attempt to do just that in the following chapters, (Chapters eight to ten).

NOTES TO CHAPTER SEVEN

1. DHO. Preface PG 44.128B NPNF V, p.387B
2. P. Mar Gregorios, *Cosmic Man, the Divine Presence: The Theology of St. Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 330 to 395 A.D.)*, (NY: Paragon House, 1980), p.58.
3. GNO, V
4. Gregory devotes eight chapters in *In Psalmo* to establish this point, see GNO 5, pp.24-65.
5. Mar Gregorios' translation, we owe this idea of the relationship of *akolouthia* to allegorical interpretation of the biblical texts to Mar Gregorios, it seems a pity that he does not extend his investigation, in his book, *Cosmic Man*, at least to other mystical writings esp. *De Vita Moysis* and *In Canticon Canticonum* which we attempt to show here, is consistent with his line of interpretation.
6. Ibid, p.59, cf. GNO 5, 67.25-68.1, and 68.5-6
7. Mar Gregorios may be right in pointing to the fact that the septuagint version of scripture often inscribes "εἰς τὸ τέλος" to many Psalms (see his listing in p.60, n.43) thus giving Gregory an opportunity for such inclination towards seeing the Psalm titles as having spiritual significance in pacing the road from vice to virtue.
8. E.g. CE I.197ff, 270-272; GNO I. 84.10ff; 105.19-106.11.
9. See J. Daniélou, "Akolouthia chez Grégoire de Nysse", *Revue de sciences religieuses*, 27(1953), 219ff.
10. Shea, *Church*, op.cit., p3.
11. Cf. Mosshammer, *The Uncreated*, passim.
12. See A. Meredith, "The Idea of God in Gregory of Nyssa", in *Studien zu Gregory von Nyssa und der Christlichen Spätantike*, (eds.) H.R. Drobner and C. Klock (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), 127-148. He sees for example E. Mühlenberg (*in Unendlichkeit Gottes*) using infinity as the salient feature of Gregory's

theology as doubtful for all the emphasis for its distinctiveness and its ability to carry the full weight of the idea of God in Gregory's thought, see 133-135.

13. Ibid., 129-131.
14. As in the *Symposium* for "Beauty" and the *Phaedrus* and the *Republic* for "Goodness".
15. NPNF, V, 356.
16. Meredith, op.cit., 130-131.
17. CE 12b, PG 45.940A-941D.
18. Musurillo, *Glory*, 119.
19. Ibid., 120.
20. Harrison, *Grace*, 64-66.
21. "It minimizes the extent to which God can be known as present and active in creation." Harrison, op.cit., p66. Harrison perhaps brings too much of Gregory's later formulation of the spiritual journey to bare on a brief passage concerning Abraham, where she admits is in a polemical context against Eunomius' optimistic claim to the capacity of knowledge of the divine essence, "by stressing God's incomprehensibility and the life of faith. overall, her opposition to Heine's (Perfection) claim that the passage does not contain descriptions of mystical experience becomes void, as that is exactly what she concludes after examining this "mystical experience". See Heine, p194, "Gregory's debates with Origenism and Eunomiumism provide a more natural and more adequate explanation for these aspects of the treatise that the mystical interpretation", in R.E.Heine, *Perfection in the Virtuous Life. A Study in the Relationship between Edification and Polemical Theology in Gregory of Nyssa's De vita Moysis*, (Mass.: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation 1975).
22. Macleod, "Allegory", 372, he thinks that this tendency in Gregory may be due to the influence of his rhetorical training, for the rhetorician's concern is with harmonious structure.
23. Ferguson, SP, 314.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE REMAKING OF MAN:PERFECTION IN VIRTUE (HOMILIES ONE TO SIX)

There is no clear verbal indication in Gregory's homilies of division of the text into systematic sections. The process of *akolouthia* applies throughout the fifteen homilies. Although all the homilies apply the convention of preaching, the sequential order in the thought system applies. Again, we cannot stress enough that allegory has the inherent aim of finding a structure and a sequence in the text allegorised, the text of the Song of Songs, unlike say Gregory's exposition of the life of Moses, has no definite plot or narrative. Origen believes that the text is a epithalamic drama, seeing a progress into an increasingly explicit union of the Bride and the Bridegroom, but this literary interpretation is but an exegetical tool to draw out the spiritual and moral teaching of the Canticle text.¹ For Gregory, the marriage imagery is adopted in so far as union between two subjects is meant, "what is described there is a marriage, but what is understood is the union of the human soul with God". [J22.18 - J23.1] But this union is taken seriously as the blending of the two subjects.

The following chapters (chapters eight to ten) are a somewhat arbitrary division of the homilies in so far as the Canticle text is concerned, but in terms of thought structure, it has its merits. Homily one to six, apart from Homily one, J39-J42, which reveals an ecclesiastical concern, the Bride, in all practical purposes, is presented as the human soul in quest for

perfection. As we have indicated,² that part on the ecclesiastical concern is a summary of a theme in the Homilies. There is no indication there of equating the Bride with the church, in fact, the church there is equated with the maidens who offer praise and seek guidance from the exalted soul.

Then from Homilies seven to ten, the Bride reenters the world of humanity. This is shown to be another stage of Gregory's contemplation of the ascent of the soul. The Bride does not exist or ascent in isolation. The world is the sphere where she finds her realm of growth in virtue,³ the ecclesiastical setting not only sees her as example, but because she is not the isolated soul, there are countless like her in the Universal Church, the imagery of the Bride increasingly identifies with a corporate image of the Church. The soul identifies with the church which in turn identifies itself with Christ, as it is called the body of Christ.

As the imagery of the Bride becomes increasingly more corporate, it becomes increasingly more difficult to separate the soul and the Church. Indeed, we see this as deliberate on Gregory's part as he gradually expounds the restoration of *all* humanity not just an individual soul, in Homilies eleven to fifteen, until he proclaims in exaltation that, "Christ is all in all".

We shall follow this scheme of thought in expounding Gregory's mystical anthropology in the homilies to the Song of Songs. For the sake of clarity we shall group each division into the following headings:

- i. The present state of the Bride;
- ii. The role of the Incarnation;

iii. The imageries of indwelling;

iv. Eternal progress;

and add to them whatever is peculiar to that division.

8.1 THE PRESENT STATE OF THE BRIDE

In contemplating the state of the Bride at the beginning of her journey to full consummation with the Bridegroom in the nuptial setting, we see Gregory equating that journey to union with the ascent of humanity from its fallen state to its realization in itself of its full glory as in its original state before the fall. Thus the state of the Bride, her original state and the state she is in before that realization to the state of her ascent to that original state, is described in terms used for Gregory's philosophical anthropology.

8.1.1 The Distinction between Uncreated and Created

The Brides compares the Groom to the *cavalry* facing the chariots of Pharaoh (Canticle 1:9). Those who prepare and attend to the horse/chariot makes a couch, in "the likeness of gold with studs of silver to beautify the horse's form". [J85.6-9]

Here Gregory tackles one of his major themes in philosophical anthropology: the distinction between Uncreated and Created.⁴ It is *the image* (τὰ ὁμοιώματα) of gold that are used not the pure gold, the studs are

also made from the material in *the likeness* of silver. (τῷ ὁμοιωματι τοῦ χρυσοῦ) The doctrine of the image of God immediately comes to mind. But Gregory explains in this way: "Every teaching concerning the ineffable nature of God, even if it seems to reveal the best and highest possible understanding, is the likeness of gold, not gold itself, for the good transcending the human mind cannot be accurately presented." [J85.17-20]

The mind cannot comprehend the ineffable nature of God, because it is created and can only do so by God revealing himself to man. The gulf is thus established between the Uncreated God and the Creation which is man.

Elsewhere the same theme is explicated. Thus although the Bride hears the voice of her beloved, she does not actual see him because of the constant shift of image of the beloved; she sees, "not his form, or face or figure indicating the nature of what is sought after, but his voice which allows inference rather than certainty about who the speaker is." [J139.3-5] The difference between the Created and Uncreated, is such that human nature is changeable, but, "the divine nature is simple, pure, of one kind, unmoved, unchangeable, always the same, and always self-contained." [J158.8-11]

It is when we come to Homily six that we see Gregory's full-fledged doctrine of this distinction between the Uncreated and Created. [see J173-J175] Summarizing his doctrine, we can see that Creation is divided into two distinct classes, one sensible and the other intelligible. And the intelligible has two aspects: the Uncreated or Creator of beings always

remains what it is; the second aspect comes into existence through creation, and this is observed in man. As we have noted in Chapter One⁵, Mosshammer sees in Gregory's more mature works the gradual emphasis of the distinction between Uncreated and Created instead of the earlier distinction between sensible and intelligible. The former distinction in fact draws man and God ever more apart. The Uncreated is completely unbounded and free since there is no interval between its will and its goal, whereas the intelligible nature in the Created now shares the διαστημα that exists, however great it progresses, the interval between will and possession remains undiminished,⁶ so that Gregory can say that, "by participation in the transcendent, it continually remains stable in the good; in a certain sense, it is always being created while ever changing for the better in its growth in perfection. Neither is it limited, nor can it be circumscribed in its growth towards the good; however, its present state of goodness, even if especially great and perfect, is only the beginning of a more transcendent, better stage." [J174.5-12] This has profound implication on his understanding of man's perpetual quest and ascent to the good.⁷

8.1.2 The Original State and the Fallen State of Man

Two imageries in this division of the homilies present the original state and the subsequent fallen state of man: that of the vineyard and its neglect and the blackened gold.

In commenting on the Bride's neglect of her own vineyard (Cantic

1:6), Gregory emphatically states that, "man did not lack at the beginning anything of the divine bounty; his task was only to protect the good things received from God, not to acquire them". However, the plotting of dangerous enemies has made man naked, for he did not guard the portion given him in his nature by God." [J54.5-11] Later he defines this portion of his nature as paradise (=vineyard) [J57.10] and this vineyard is immortality, "a state free from passion, likeness to God and estrangement from evil," [J60.4-5] the fruits of which are purity; union and kinship with eternal life; the many faceted ornament of divine virtues. Thus we see Gregory's rather figurative way of presenting the original state of man as immortal and free from passion. But all these are lost when man sinned and fell.

The imagery of the darkened gold has Greek philosophical echoes.⁸ Gregory starts his fourth homily with this imagery. He states emphatically that, "human nature was golden at the beginning and shone by reason of its resemblance to the undefiled gold". [J100.16-18] This closely resembles Plotinus' description of the true state of the soul which has no element in it of unreasoning passion, anger and other kind of παθός.⁹ Whereas Plotinus sees this soul always remaining in the intellectual world and does not fall, nevertheless it is necessary to purify all extraneous elements, "which have somehow grown onto it," and which obscure its native loveliness; Gregory uses similar terminology, but add on the provenance of sin and passion, it became discoloured and blackened by the admixture of vice"; this admixture of vice is described quite thoroughly in Homily two as the Bride's neglect to tend her own vineyard and also as being coerced to

guard the vineyard of others.¹⁰ The blackened gold corresponds to the black texture of the Bride's previous appearance, the cause of this darkness is uniformly put to the free will in human nature, "the cause of darkness is not ascribed to the Creator, but its origin is attributed to the free will of each person." [J50.5-9] The nature of free will in the human nature existing in flux is such that, "in changeable human nature, good and evil exist by turns because we have the capacity to choose either one of two contraries. As a result, the good in us alternates with the evil, and the evil becomes a limit on the good." [J158.1-6] But this is linked with the biblical concept of temptation. Commenting on the parable of the sower and the seeds, Gregory proposes that, "human nature was an image of the true light, far removed from any darkness; it gleamed by imitation of the archetype's beauty. Temptation, however, which cast down flaming heat through deception, struck down the first tender shoot lacking roots ... Temptation has made it black by the burning heat." [J51.18-20] Thus free will is swayed to vice by temptation.¹¹ Perhaps the fullest statement of sin through free choice comes from Gregory's contemplation of biblical teaching of St. Paul [ICor. 8],

"God gave to rational nature the grace of free will and bestowed on man the power to find what he wants that the good might be present in our lives, not coerced and involuntary, but the result of free choice. The movement of our will freely leads us to apparent realities. In the nature of things is found someone who misused this free will, and according to the Apostle's word, it has become an inventor of wicked deeds." [J55.4-11]

In all the images Gregory appears to be more interested in the fallen

state of man rather than in the cause of that state. He is content to stress that man's sinful state is to be attributed to man's perverse use of his free will. Gregory is not, however, concerned with human sinfulness as such, but he is principally more concerned with the great transformation that will take place in man when God takes flesh, and he portrays human sinful state in order to bring out more clearly and forcefully the great work of Christ in redeeming human nature.

8.1.3 Grace and Redemption

A direct denial of the Plotinian doctrine of self-discovery through introversion of the soul is afforded by Gregory's doctrine of the redemption of human nature. Whereas Plotinus¹² seems to affirm both the natural self-sufficiency and self-perfectibility of the human soul with no external agent, Gregory emphasises the grace of the redeemer, he interprets the Bride's appraisal for her state as, "I am black and beautiful" as a progression, a favourite method when apposition of adjectives occur such as here: the Bride progresses from blackness to beauty thus, "Although I have become dark through sin and have dwelt in gloom by my deeds, the bridegroom made me beautiful through his love, having exchanged his own beauty for my disgrace. After taking the filth of my sins upon himself, he allowed me to share his own purity, and filled me with his beauty. He who first made me lovely from my own repulsiveness, has showed his love for me." [J46.10-

17] That exchange of beauty for disgrace is what the Bible terms salvation by Christ laying down his life for his sheep "Even though I am black, you laid down your life for your sheep, you their shepherd. No greater love than this can be comprehended, for you exchanged your life for my salvation." [J61.20 - J62.1] Following the same method of progress in thought of the appositive adjectives, when the Bride says she is "a the tents of Cedar, as the curtains of Solomon", (Canticle 1:5), Gregory describes how Christ has come into the world to save sinners and through repentance and baptism, which washed away its dark form, the blackened soul is received by Christ and he, "restores its beauty by fellowship with himself. If anyone is a 'tent of Cedar', he becomes a dwelling of light for the true Solomon, that is, the king of peace dwelling in him". [J49.17 - J50.1]

Thus Gregory sets the scene for two important aspects of his mystical anthropology: the gradual acquisition of man's past beauty by being gracefully allowed to participate in the divine beauty, and the indwelling of Christ in the baptized believer as he confesses the salvific work of the Incarnate Lord.

8.2 THE ROLE OF THE INCARNATION

Homily four brings to the fore the role of the Incarnation in the ongoing life of man in transformation. For fear of repeating ourselves (all exposition is done in Chapter two, 2.4), we shall just mainly indicate the various ways in which the concept of the Incarnation profoundly affects

Gregory's contemplation on the remaking of man.

As we have indicated above (8.1.3), the soul's ascent to acquire its original pure state in Gregory's thought contains a very strong element of grace, it is not self-sufficient due to its fallenness; it is not self-perfectible because it depends on the redemptive, gracious act of God. So Gregory is able to explain the concept of the Good Shepherd in terms of this redemption, "For there is one sheep which you have taken upon your shoulders, our human nature." [J61.8-9] Christ is the Good Shepherd who takes upon his shoulders the one sheep of human nature, which is at the same time the whole flock.

By quoting Paul (Phil. 2:15), Gregory says that Christ entered the world to enlighten those who were dark. [J48.18 - J49.1] The response is to go through "the bath of regeneration which washed away the dark form". [J49.3-4] The Incarnation not only enlightens but also destroys "the hostile powers by his life ... to trample and destroys the haughty evil deeds of demons". [J140-142]

The bath of regeneration has another way of describing its process: the springtime of a new creation. [J153-J155] If the Bride's sinful state was the "Winter of Disobedience", then the Incarnation is the great springtime, the rising of the Sun of Righteousness that melts man's frozen love towards God and thaws him out so that he can again become, "water leaping up into eternal life". With the coming of springtime, the dead flower of human nature can begin to "bud and be adorned with its own flower", i.e. the virtues. The Bride is the new creation itself that blossoms forth with the

Springtime of the Incarnation.

For Gregory, the Incarnation itself implies the whole redemptive work of Christ, for it is the presence of God among man, and his presence is an effective one. One could almost say that for Gregory the Incarnation is the redemption of Man. But Christ's redemption does not stop at relieving man from the bondage of sin, but continues to empower him through divine indwelling, i.e. he injects the power of his divinity into human nature, purging it of evil and vice, sanctifying and divinizing it.

This is when the soul begins to realize that the mechanics of divinization is the same as the mechanics of the Incarnation (*pace* Homily four), but Gregory is emphatic about the gulf that exists between the Created and Uncreated; the soul realizes that his divinization is radically different in kind with Christ's divine presence in the flesh, but instead of falling into despair, the soul can by the example of Christ in the flesh advance in virtue, so that the Incarnation also serve as a paradigm for virtuous life. In Gregory's words, "the Bride comprehended the mystery in the rock of the Gospel to which the World led her by many and various ways ... Now she desires his appearance in the flesh, that the Word may become flesh and God may be seen in the flesh and speak about the divine promises of eternal happiness for those who are worthy." [J164.2-9]

8.3 IMAGERIES OF INDWELLING

Students of Gregory note how Gregory uses philosophical reasoning

and vivid imagery as parallel ways of seeking to express the same ineffable realities; some would go as far as saying that metaphor and allegory proves more essential to him as means of expression.¹³ Harrison notes that, "Gregory's verbal images are not 'mere' metaphors or rhetorical decorations, nor are they only poetic symbols pointing to the ineffable and the transcendent, though this function of imagistic language is essential to his spirituality."¹⁴ But this is not to be taken as relegating his philosophical analysis into a minor role, his imageries supplement that of philosophical musings and produced a work that is at once poetic and analytic.

8.3.1 Imagery of Growth

Gregory uses several vivid images to express that which cannot be expressed adequately. Admittedly, it is only through association that the ineffable can be expressed at all, and images of indwelling is a particular issue in point. Gregory emphatically stated that the mechanics of the Incarnation is a mystery, so the process of divinization, which in actual fact is equivalent to the manifestation of the Lord's divinity in the flesh, and a dynamic process. A vivid image is that of the metaphor of growth of the child Jesus: "The child Jesus born within us advances by different ways in those who receive him in wisdom, in age, and in grace. He is not the same in every person, but is present according to the measure of the person receiving him. He shows himself according to each one's capacity. He comes either as an infant, or a child advancing in age, or as a fully grown ..."

[J96.8-13]

The dynamic process can be followed up by the imagery of the young figs in Homily five [J155.1-10] The process of carthasis is achieved in the natural growth of the the fig tree. It draws moisture from deep within the earth, and as it gathers moisture, it also exudes or rejects by a natural process through the ends of its branches what is superfluous and impure. The process continues until the tree puts forth pure, nourishing fruit at the right season, but before it could do so, it will put forth a kind of forerunner called a young fig which is sometimes edible for those who wish to take it.

Gregory compares this with human nature, gathering "evil moisture during the 'winter' of the spirit". However, consistent with his exertion that the fallen nature cannot be self-sufficient and self-perfecting, Christ achieves in human nature what it cannot achieve for itself, he indwells human nature and by a process of elimination, rejects the impure in the human nature and add the distinctive marks of hope and maturity. Human nature at this stage is still called a young fig, meaning that whatever she has achieved is but a forerunner of what is hers when she attains maturity.¹⁵

Three other imageries are used to describe and elaborate this concept: the fountain, the perfumes, the Archer and his arrow. Each imagery deepens in meaning as the soul ascends in each stage to perfection.

8.3.2 Imagery of the Fountain

Very early in the Bride's realization of her salvation that can only

come through the Good Shepherd, she asks her Bridegroom to show where he feeds, that she might be filled with the heavenly food, "and running to you, the fountain, I will drink from the divine stream which you cause to spring up for those thirsting after you. Water pours out from your side and the spear has opened the vein. The person tasting it will become a spring welling up into eternal life." [J62.2-7]

The eating and drinking imagery is combined with the spring of eternal life, a Johannine imagery, and linked with the crucifixion. It is as though one thing leads to the other, and all speaks of the work of Christ on the redeemed. But this fountain imagery is not fully developed into spirituality of deep significance until very much later, the meaning can be shown to be gradually intensified. But here, we have to be content with the description of the Bridegroom/Christ as the fountain, "from which the words of eternal life well forth" [J32.18-19] and this is grace for he who well up with life for all wishes all to be saved. [J33.4-6] The thirsting soul has only to bring its mouth to the mouth that springs up with life, signifying the receiving of Christ into its nature.

8.3.2 Imagery of the Perfumes

In Homily One, Gregory first expounds the imagery of the perfumes, which is in abundance in the Canticle text, in terms of Christ or God himself. The perfume itself is the divine essence. When the Canticle text says, "Your name is ointment poured forth" (Canticle 1:3), we must take it

as meaning that the ointment/perfume is now absent from the jar that holds it. Only a faint trace of the vapour exudes the fragrant smell,

"Whatever name we may adopt to signify the perfume of divinity, it is not the perfume itself which we signify by our expressions; rather, we reveal just the slightest trace of the divine odour by means of our theological terms. As in the case of jars from which perfume has been poured out, the perfume's own nature is not known. But the slight traces left from the vapours in the jar we get some idea about the perfume that has been emptied out. Hence we learn that the perfume of divinity, whatever it is in its essence, transcends every name and thought. However, the wonders visible in the universe give material for the theological terms by which we call God wise; powerful, good, holy, blessed, eternal, judge, saviour, and so forth." [J37.3-16]

This very distinction is the essence and the revealed attributes is important in Gregory's imagery of the divine indwelling. Later when the Bride herself exudes the fragrance, she must not be looked upon as divine, but derives her fragrance from the Perfume itself, what can be smell on her is the revealed attributes which exude through her.

This is true of the first stage of the Bride's ascent as described in this first division, Homilies one to six. As we have observed in Chapter two, 2.3.4, imitation is the key term here:

"We think that the Word teaches us here about his essence underlying the order and structure of creation: it is inaccessible, intangible and incomprehensible. Instead of the Word we have in us this compounded fragrance from the perfection of virtues. It imitates by its own purity that which by nature is incorruptible; by its goodness it imitates his goodness; by its incorruptibility, his incorruptibility; by its immutability, his immutability, and by everything in us effected through virtue, his true virtue which contains all the heavens ..." [J89.15-90.2]

But imitation is inadequate to the concept of indwelling or

participation. Those who made themselves fragrant with all the virtues still cannot look upon the Word of God as upon the sun [J90.10-11], i.e. "moral efforts by themselves cannot bridge the ontological gulf separating the Created from the Uncreated so as to bring us knowledge of the divine nature."¹⁶ But fortunately, Gregory does not terminate his usage of this imagery here. Later, as the Bride ascends higher, the fragrance of Christ exudes out of her as if the fragrance is her. Therefore when St. Paul becomes for others "the good odour of Christ" (II Cor. 2:15), the terminology of participation and divine indwelling is more obvious. The apostle acquires the fragrance not from his own imitation but from the Lord,

"Paul inhaled that inaccessible, transcendent grace and gave himself to others as incense to take according to their ability; according to each person's disposition, Paul became a fragrance bringing either life or death ... Titus, Silvanus, and Timothy all partook of the fragrance of Paul's perfume and progressed in every deed with Paul as their example." [J91.8 - J92.2]

The recipient of the fragrance becomes fragrance, just like the recipient of the living-water is said to become living water. Yet whatever the immediate source of the gift, the recipient is free to choose either to reject or accept it. Those, like Demas (2 Tim 4:10), Alexander (2 Tim 4:14) or Hermogene (2 Tim 1:15) refused the fragrance and were banished like the beetle who dies on inhalation of the perfume's good fragrance. [J92].

8.3.4 The Imagery of Wounding

One of the most vivid images of divine indwelling comes from the

Canticle text which says, "for I am wounded with love". (Canticle 2:6) Gregory skillfully combine this image with that of the archer and arrow, making it one of the rarest gems in his imagination.

The Biblical text is John 14:23, "I and the Father are one, we will come and make our home with him." This comes directly from the great passage about the Incarnation, "He dwelt in our existence through flesh and blood, and in place of the joy set before him, he voluntarily partook of our humility even to the point of experiencing death." [J126.17-21] The Incarnation leads to indwelling, for the image changes from anchoring on the Incarnation to the Bowman with the arrow. Here Gregory's thought becomes confused in his exhilaration in realizing the reality of God making his home in man. The images change meaning so quickly that it is difficult to pin down the exact context. [see Chapter Two, 2.4.8]

The Bride praises the Bowman, presumably referring to the Bridegroom/Christ, for his good marksmanship because he hits her with his arrow. And because the Bride's exhilarated cry is, "I am wounded with love", presumably, the arrow that penetrates the depth of her heart must be love. But, no! It is love that wounds here, the arrow is the "chosen", only-begotten Son. So it is God that wounds, with the arrow which is the Son, and because the arrow's tip is dipped in the Spirit of life, the wound took on a pregnant theological implication. The Unity of the Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, indwells the soul bringing love, salvation and life. And because Gregory sees the arrow's tip as faith, it is only through faith that divine indwelling is realized and becomes a reality. In Homily six, we can

see a more sober description of the same process of indwelling through faith.

"She [the Bride] realizes that her sought- after love is known only in her impossibility to comprehend his essence, and that every sign becomes a hindrance to those who seek him. Therefore the bride says, 'when I passed them a little,' I left every creature and passed by every intelligible being in creation; having forsaken every manner of comprehension, I found my beloved by faith. No longer will I let him go once found by faith until he comes within my chamber. The 'chamber' is indeed the heart which becomes an acceptable dwelling of God when it returns to that state which it had in the beginning ..." [J183]

Thus instead of inflicting a mortal blow on the soul,"the arrow's penetration opens up, as it were, a door and entrance for love." [J128.5-7] But the imagery of the arrow shifts meaning midway as Gregory tries to combine the next Canticle verse with the archer, "His left hand is under my head, and his right hand shall embrace me." (Canticle 2.6) The Bride is now the arrow in the archer's hands, being held one way by his right hand and in another by his left, aiming at the target. But the tautness of the outstretched arms suddenly become embracing arms of the beloved for his lover in nuptial delight. This creates a double meaning for the nature of divine ascent:

"God is both the bridegroom and the archer. He treats the purified soul as a bride and as an arrow aimed at a good target. He therefore allows his bride to participate in his eternal incorruptibility." [J129.5-8]

The arrow is directed at its target, signifying the Archer's grace in sending the soul on its ascent to the target which is at the beginning perfect, but simultaneously, the arrow is at rest in the Archer's arms,

repose arrow being directed at its target.

The wound of the arrow produces love, faith and life and instead of causing mortal blow becomes intoxicated with love. The deep penetration of the arrow signifies that divine indwelling which is at once the source strength for the ascent of the soul and at the same time reassures the soul of its truly repose state in the arm of the beloved.

8.4 PROGRESS IN VIRTUE

We can now summarize our findings in this ~~de~~^{as}vision of the Homilies and see ~~the~~^{as} Gregory is preoccupied with describing the remaking of man by progress in virtue.

Here and there, Gregory attempts summary of the progress of the soul in Homilies one to six. In Homily five for example,

"We now see the bride being led by the Word up a rising staircase by the steps of virtue to the heights of perfection. First the Word sends her a ray of light through the windows of the prophets and the lattices of the Law. He exhorts her to draw near to the light and to become beautiful by being transformed into a dove's image in the light. The bride at this point partakes in the good as much as she can. Then he starts again to draw her to participate in a higher beauty, as if she had never tasted it. Thus, as she progresses, her desire grows with each step. And, because there is always unlimited good beyond what the bride has attained, she always seems to be just beginning her ascent." [J158.19 - J159.12]

The process of akolouthia is very much evident here. The movement and sequence of the soul in ascent is like a rising staircase, with each step well defined, and throughout the imagery of light guides the thought as the

soul partakes in the good, which to Gregory, is already there but need only to reclaim. But when the movement proceeds, it becomes more evident that this more than mere reclamation of the lost image and likeness. The Bridegroom says, "It is not enough for you to arise from your fall, but you must advance through progress in the good to finish the course of virtue." [J149.4-6]

So in this division, from Homilies one to six, the main preoccupation seems to be this course of virtue that must be completed. Even with the three canonical books attributed to the authorship of Solomon, it becomes three stages of progress in virtue. Just as the bodily growth of the human being passes through different levels of maturity, each with its distinctive mode of existence, so also the soul goes through different stages in its progress,¹⁷ "So too one can see in the soul an analogy to the body's growth where there is a certain order and sequence (Τάξις καὶ ἀκολουθία) leading to a life in accord with virtue." [J18.4-7]

The movement consists mainly in carthasis, "Let each person go out of himself and out of the material world, let him ascend into paradise through detachment (δι' ἀπαθείας), having become like God through purity" (διὰ καθαρότητος) [J25.6-9]. In fact this process of cleansing is necessary, just like a full cup cannot receive more, it must be emptied before new liquid could be poured it, the soul must exchange one desire for another, "the soul must transform passion into passionlessness (μετενεγκουσάν εἰς ἀπαθειαν τὸ πάθος) so that when every corporeal affection has been quenched, our mind may seethe with passion for the Spirit alone and be

warmed by that fire which the Lord came to cast upon the earth." [J27.11-16] The mere hint of the Incarnation is not explored until the soul is ready to receive this divine mystery of God dwelling in and with men. Desire is ambivalent, it can result in "corporeal affection" or it could set the mind to "seethe with passion for the Spirit alone." The desire that sets the mind to the quest is that of a lover for the beloved, "the hope of being loved in return disposes the lover to a more intense desire". [J22] As with Moses, so it is with all others in whom the desire for God is deeply embedded: "they never cease to desire, but with every enjoyment of God they turn into the kindling of a still more intense desire." [J32]

And as with the Song of Songs itself, detachment from corporeal affection is couched in the language of passion. So begins the text of the Canticle and so begins the journey of the soul in its progress for virtue.

In a typical passage of linkage, Gregory in Homily three gives the gist of the content in the previous one, Homily two, by recapitulating the essence of the soul beginning the path virtue: "the soul must watch over herself and know herself". [J72.9-10]

So in effect Homily two, which is the presentation of the beginning of the journey to restoration carries with it the Greek notion of knowing oneself and sin of ignorance:

"It is said that ignorance of oneself is the beginning and consequence of never having known anything of the things which one ought to know. How could anyone obtain knowledge while he is ignorant of himself?" [J72.10-12]¹⁸

This realization in fact corresponds to the Biblical notion of sin due

to free choice, so Homily one sets itself up to present the state of fallenness of the soul. As we have indicated on the present state of the Bride, (8.1.2 above) the original state is lost due to ignoring its own welfare, but redemption is not far, as Grace came to the rescue. The stress on grace means that the recovery of the "undefiled gold" in man is not self-motivated but centres on the redemptive work of God, so that the effect of that realization of the state of oneself not only sets the soul on the return journey, it also points towards the path in which the soul should go. This prepares for the introduction of the notion of Incarnation into the ascent. And Homily three immediately follows this up by preparing the soul to meet the Incarnate Christ.

The soul is illuminated by the coming of redemption, but the gulf between the Created and the Uncreated is such that the mystical journey of encounter is overshadowed by the deliberate elusive absence, and Gregory is quick to point out that this is "because God foresees something even better in store for her".

At the stage of the journey, all sense perception is employed but sight is denied, as no one can see God and live. But whatever sense perceptions are employed, they are enough to indicate to the soul that it is in the right path, for the Bridegroom prompts it on, "Once the governing part of the soul has been cleansed, the Word rises like the sun for her who desires him and exhorts her to greater perfection by receiving what is already present, for praise of deeds rightly instills a keener desire for the Good." [J72.12-14] So in effect Gregory pronounces what is involved at this stage of the

journey: the restoration or remaking of man is by first realization of self and follow by realization that his own perfection lies in participation in divine goodness, and because divine goodness is infinite and also because the gulf between the created and Uncreated is an eternal διάστημα, man can only realize his true destiny by endlessly participation in God.

But a person who prepares himself in virtue by keeping in purity so that he is fit to be indwell by the divine, but also by faith, for by faith the soul receives images and likeness of the truth and this become "submissive and be a dwelling place through faith for the One about to recline and dwell in." The theme of indwelling gradually takes over the description of man's journey to his destiny, for it is by divine indwelling that man can hope to attain his original beauty by becoming "a house containing that nature which cannot be contained" [J88.4] for "Whoever has God on himself indeed has him within himself, and he who received him in himself transcends what had formerly been". [J84.14-17]

It is at this stage of the movement that the soul comes face to face with the reality of the Incarnation. Through the taking up of the flesh of the divine, the divine indwelling in human nature is possible and a reality, the difference however is stressed. By imitation, and by the emphasis of like is akin to like, the soul imitates its source, deriving from the source the virtues and internalises them. But this attainment of virtue provides the occasion for the purification of the body and soul, and becomes the receptacle for the divine indwelling.

Thus far, imitation is the key word. But by imitation, is implied that the soul must be able to perceive in order to imitate, thus if sense perception is denied or if reality is more than what sense can perceive, then sense perception cannot lead the soul into this invisible realm, thus imitation is limited. Encounter of another kind comes into play, going beyond the realm of the senses. This, Gregory terms the divine might. (See Chapter Two, 2.6.2) "The sensible is grasped by sense, while the intelligible transcends sensible comprehension." [J173.9-10] The conclusion of the Bride is that, "she realizes that her sought-after love is known only in her impossibility to comprehend his essence, and that every sign becomes a hindrance to those who seek him". [J183.2-5] Thus as we have indicated in the imagery of wounding (8.3.4), the bride takes a leap in the dark and finds her way to her lover via another way, Faith.

Now, like Moses after entering the darkness where God is, the soul is ready to enter the world of humanity.

NOTES TO CHAPTER EIGHT

1. See Part IV passim.
2. Cf. Part II, Chapter Two, 2.1.6.
3. Cf. Part II, Chapter Three, 3.7.
4. See Chapter One, passim.
5. See Chapter One, 1.1.
6. Cf. Mosshammer "Uncreated", art.cit., 370.
7. see this Chapter, 8.4 below.
8. E.g. Plotinus, Ennead iv. 7.10.42-52, see Meredith's analysis in, "Gregory of Nyssa and Plotinus", art.cit. 1120-1126.
9. Cf. Ennead iv. 7.10.7ff.
10. Cf. exposition in Homily two, in Chapter two, 2.2.2, see Meredith, art.cit. 1121-1122, commenting on Plotinian theory, he says, "The question is not how we are to be rid of the rust, a problem he also treats at Enn. i. 6.5.45, but how it got there in the first place; and that is a question which on his own principles he is unable to answer", 1122-1123.
11. See Part II, Chapter Two, 2.2.2 for a fuller analysis.
12. *Pace* Meredith, *ibid.*, 1123.
13. For various appreciation of Gregory's creative use of metaphor, allegory and imageries, see Jean Laplace, ed. *Grégoire de Nysse. La création de l'homme* (Sources Chrésiennes 6, Paris, 1943), 7-13; H. Musurillo, "History and Symbol: A Study of Form in Early Christian Literature", *TS* 18(1957), 357-386; K.M. Tharakan, *The Poetic Act. An Enquiry into the Poetics of St. Basil of Caesarea and St. Gregory of Nyssa of the Universal Church* (Madras: MacMillan, 1979), 48-71; M. Canévet, *Grégoire de Nysse et l'herméneutique biblique* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1983); V.E.F. Harrison, *Grace*, op.cit., 97-131.
14. Harrison, *Grace*, op. cit., 98.

15. Cf. Chapter Two, 2.5.4.
16. Harrison, *op. cit.* p101. Harrison fails to see a progression in thought in Gregory's imagery, each description, as it were, gives a deeper meaning to that imagery as the soul ascent ; she sees Gregory as a remarkably coherent and consistent thinker, thus, she can "draw together what he says on each point in different texts without worrying about the question of development within his thought", p6. So typically, *akolouthia* as an important concept in Gregory is ignored. Thus she finds it hard to reconcile an earlier development of the perfume imagery as preparation for participation and indwelling with later, more overt reference to divine indwelling, say in Homilies nine and eleven. As a result, her analysis is flawed.
17. Cf. Harrison, "Receptacle", *art.cit.* 34.
18. See a fuller analysis in Chapter Two, 2.2.6.

CHAPTER NINE

THE REMAKING OF MAN: TO BE LIKE THE ARCHETYPE (HOMILIES SEVEN TO TEN)

This division represents another stage in the soul's ascent to perfection. We see the importance of ecclesiastical setting which is rare in his earlier works and which seldom takes on an important role since in his later works like *De Vita Moysis*. Even I.M. Shea who investigates the concept of the Church in Gregory of Nyssa admits to the relatively little mention of ecclesiology in Gregory's work, and sees the Canticle Homilies as the only work that has some concentration of thought on the topic.¹ Shea sees Gregory's interpretation of the figure of the Bride as very complex,

"Thus in one symbol of the Bride, he can see humanity as a whole, both in its sinful state before the Incarnation, and in its redeemed state after the Incarnation. He can see the Church as the Body of Christ, a living organism of the baptized. He can see the individual soul as the beloved of Christ, in her most personal relationship with Christ, seeking him in the depths of her own grace-filled being. Yet he also sees the individual soul as a member of the Church, with relations to others in the Church and responsibilities towards others in the Church. At times, too, he sees in the individual the whole Church personified, especially as regards her teaching role."²

No wonder Shea himself comments that, "Gregory oscillates between these various interpretations of the Bride, without always stopping to point out where he is going".³ This apparent confusion in Gregory's interpretation, we submit, comes mainly in the failure to see the homilies as a sequence and a movement. The gradual revelation of the state of the Bride at each stage of her ascent accounts for the incorporation of the concept of the Church as communion of saints into an otherwise more

individualistic identification of the Bride as the soul in the first stages of the development. Even Shea notices the comparatively little mention of the Church in the first few homilies.⁴ The gradual move from individual quest to increasingly corporate one in the image of the Bride's ascent is deliberate on Gregory's part. He sees not only the concern of that ascent as beneficial to individual souls but as the introduction of other characters in ^{the} Cantic text provide evidence of the existence of others in the marriage imagery, so too it reveals the existence of fellow seekers in the quest for beauty and perfection. As we have indicated, [Chapter eight, passim], the soul identifies with the Church which in turn identifies herself with Christ, as it is called the body of Christ.

9.1 THE PRESENT STATE OF THE BRIDE

In the start of this division, the Homilies assume the exalted state of the Bride which is beneficial to the Church and because the Bride's quest for her true glory is put into an ecclesiastical setting, there ^{are} is mutual benefits as well as the Bride shares her experience with the church and the Church nourishes the soul with her teaching, so as to promote further mutual growth.

Even in the exalted state, the Bride is acutely aware of the gulf that separates her from her Bridegroom. In Homily eight, Gregory drops hints of this difference by his exposition of Cantic 4.9, "Our sister, our spouse, you have given us heart, with one of your eyes, with one ..." Gregory sees

this as the bride's friends attributing praise to one of her eyes, the one by which she sees him done. And then he launches on the "Aloneness" of God,

"By the term 'alone' I mean he who is comprehended in his immutable and eternal nature, the true Father, the only-begotten Son, and the Holy Spirit. God is truly alone, contemplated in one nature, with no separation or division according to the difference of persons (μόνον γάρ ἐστιν ὡς ἀληθῶς τὸ ἐν μιᾷ θεωρούμενον φύσει, μηδένα χωρισμὸν ἢ ἀλλοτριώσιν τῆς κατὰ τὰς υποστάσεις διαφορᾶς ἐμποιοῦσης)" [J258.4-6]

The changeability of man is contrasted with the immutability of God. But the usual ingredient of philosophical anthropology can be found here. By its own free choice, human nature has the capacity to become either vessels of gold or vessels of wood, by thus purifying itself, it would be like what the Apostle says, "for if anyone purifies himself, he will be a worthy vessel for the Lord, a vessel prepared for every good deed ..." (2Tim. 2:21) Free choice is inherent in the changeability of human nature, so that mutability can become, "an ally in our ascent towards higher things, and by the changeability of our nature we are to establish it immovably in the good". [J252.15-17] In other words, it could be transformed, so the soul at this stage is once again reminded that, "although man was once made in God's image, he was transformed into an irrational animal, [but afterwards] passed through the Jordan, myrrh, and frankincense and rose to such a height that it now walks with God." [J251.3-10]

Life tasted sweeter after a life and death struggle to survive, therefore, "the bridegroom imparts to the soul ascending to him an intensity

in her enjoyment of goodness. Not only does he manifest his own beauty to the bride, but he reminds her of her horrible, beastly forms in order that she may delight in her present enjoyment, by comparing them with her former state". [J251.24 - J252.9]

Not only that, the Bridegroom bids the soul that has advanced to approach him,

"It is immediately strengthened at his command and becomes what he wishes, that is, changed into something divine, and from the glory which the soul had, it is transformed into a loftier glory by a wonderful alteration." [J253.12-18]

The progress is so great that even the angelic choir marvels. [J253.19-20]

9.2 THE ROLE OF THE INCARNATION

The act of the Incarnation emphasized in this division is decidedly an act of φιλανθρωπία, the love of mankind compels God to show his mercy and the result is

the Incarnation. The Cantic text in Homily ten, "Let him come down" (Cantic 4:16) is similar to invocation, "may your will be done", thus Gregory interprets it as God's mercy in the act of Incarnation:

"The bridegroom's coming down signifies his love (Τῆς φιλανθρωπίας) for mankind. We cannot otherwise be lifted up to the Most High unless the Lord inclines to the humble and exalt the meek. Therefore, the soul rising on high calls upon the help of the transcendent God and prays that he descend from his own greatness so as to be easily reached by those here below." [J304.16 - J305.2]

That Christ condescended to come in the flesh represents a significant point for Gregory as he describes the Church in more ways than one. By the Incarnation:

i. Reconciliation of the world is achieved.

"Who then, is peaceful, has destroyed the enemy, and nailed it to the Cross. We who were his enemy? Rather, her reconciled the entire world to himself and tore down the partition wall which acted as a hedge in order that he might create two persons into one new man in himself: he proclaimed peace to those far off and to those nearby by announcing good tidings." [J201.11-17]

ii. By reconciling so establishing the Church on earth.

The explication of the doctrine of the Incarnation becomes increasingly Pauline in character as Gregory explains the imagery of myrrh and frankincense in Homily seven. (See chapter Three, 3.1.8) Frankincense is consistently identified with divinity just as myrrh is consistently identified with death. So when the text says that the Bridegroom will "go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense" (Canticle 4:6), the immediate identification with Christ's death and resurrection is apparent. And for human nature, it is precisely because of this that hope enters to its existence, "human nature cannot be purged from the stain (of sin) unless the Lamb who takes the sin of the world destroys evil, ... [but] he who partakes of myrrh with Christ will indeed partake of frankincense, for he who suffers with him will be glorified with him". [J243]

This is important as Gregory gradually introduces the theme of the redeemed Church into the picture, it is in Homily eight that we begin to see Gregory relating more closely the role of Incarnation with the redemption

and sanctification of the Church (See Chapter Three, 3.2.4). In the Incarnation, God has effected a union of opposites: "life through death, justification through sin, blessing through a curse, glory through disgrace and strength through weakness." [J255.7-9] So the Word becomes flesh, life is mixed with death, so much so that in the church, the redeemed people of God, the invisible, incomprehensible is present in all creatures" [J256.10-12] and this is a marvelous sight to behold.

9.3 IMAGERIES OF INDWELLING

Gregory confines to two major imageries in this division of the Homilies: that of the Fountain/living water and the perfumes, but in each, he sees an intensified meaning in the imageries as the soul realizes deeper the implication and reality of the divine indwelling in human nature.

9.3.2 Imagery of the Fountain

The imagery of the fountain occurs in Homily eight and Homily nine, both intensify that imagery of indwelling first mentioned in the first stage of the Bride's ascent⁵ there, the thirsting soul brings its mouth to the mouth of the life-giving, everlasting spring, and receives Christ into its nature. This mere statement of indwelling is expanded to expound the process of divinization.

In Homily eight, the soul has entered into a higher stage of ascent, so greater participation in God is expected. Drawing from the living water imagery in John 7:37, Gregory links the fountain imagery with continual progress:

"The fountain of grace continually draws to itself those who are thirsty. As the Fountain himself says in the Gospel, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and let him drink. By these words [Christ] set no limit on our thirst, nor on our movement towards him, nor on the satisfaction of our drinking, but by extending his command indefinitely in time, he exhorts us to thirst, drink, and to move towards him. To those, however, who have already tasted and have learned by experience that the Lord is good, the faculty of taste becomes a kind of incitement to further progress (μετουσίαν). Therefore, a person always moves towards God never lacks this incitement towards greater progress (ἐφελκόμενη). [J248.5-16]

The ever-flowing fountain quenches the ever-thirsting soul. Christ prompts the soul to greater desire to be filled by him and move towards him. Those who tasted of the sweetness and goodness of the fountain will naturally desire more, thus greater participation leads to greater progress, from one level of fulfillment to another, higher level.

The imagery of the fountain is further intensified in Homily nine. Here the Bride is called, "a well of living water". [Canticle 4:5] There are imageries of living water in the Gospel which identify with Christ. (e.g. John 7:37-39) But the important aspect for us is that, "each of these passages says that living water is the divine nature." [J292.20] When this is linked with the Bride as the living water, we see how far Gregory is prepared to go in describing the process of divine indwelling and divinisation:

"All wells contain still water; one the bride has running water

with both a well's depth and a continuous flow of water. Who can worthily comprehend the wonders applied to the bride? It seems that she has no further to reach once she has been compared to beauty's archetype. She closely imitates her bridegroom's fountain by one of her own; his life by hers and his water by her water. God's Word is living, and the soul who has received it is living. That kind of water flows from God as the Fountain himself says, "from God I proceeded and I came." The bride contains his inflow of water with the well of her soul and becomes a treasure house of that living water flowing from Lebanon ... We become partakers of God by possessing that well ..." [J293.3-19]

Thus there is even here a progress of thought on the process of divine indwelling. The bride images the Archetype as closely as a created being can. "What distinguishes her from her Creator is that while he is the source of all the life he gives to his creatures, she receives all of her life from him."⁶ As we have indicated in Part II, Chapter three 3.9.8, the Bride has reached such height in her spiritual ascent that she becomes the well in which the source of living water in the salvation of mankind, and yet she must recognise that the outflowing of that living water is but the overflowing of the living water from the source or the Fountain himself, who is Christ.

9.3.2 Imagery of the Perfumes

As we have pointed out in Chapter Eight, 8.3.2, the recipient of the fragrance becomes fragrant, so it is with the use of this imagery in this division of the Homilies. We have already indicate^k the close and deliberate description of the affinity of the seeker and the sought-after. There is a union and the union brought about the interchange of beatitudes and

characters, as the soul draws ever closer to God, so much so that the Bridegroom uses the same praise reserved at first only for himself to elevate the status of the Bride. (See Chapter Three, 3.3.2) The fragrance of Christ become the fragrance of the elevated soul.

Back behind this identification still lies the unbridgeable gulf between the Created and Uncreated. In Canticle 1:2-3, the reference to the ointments/perfumes, is the life-giving force to the soul which inhale its scent. But with the description in Canticle 4:10, the Bride is unable to give life, but an only point to the source of life and worship that source. Thus the soul exudes the sweet smelling sacrificial fragrance because it is able to witness to the life-giving message of the Gospel, "the soul becomes fragrant in her life, breathing the myrrh of priesthood and the incense of conscience composed from different virtues, her life is a sweet smelling odour to the bridegroom". [J268.8-11]

It is only in the exposition of Canticle 4:11, "The smell of your garments is as a smell of frankincense," that we see yet a greater intensity in the imagery of the perfumes. As we have indicated in 9.2 (this chapter), frankincense represents divinity. But this is the new garments, having discarded the old garment of sin, the soul is clothed with divinity itself. But it is not frankincense itself, but the garment that give off the ^{my}swell of frankincense, signifying the exalted state of the Bride, and as usual Gregory's wording is deliberately vague concerning identification with Christ, "The garment of your virtues, my bride, imitates the divine blessedness and resembles the transcendent divine nature by your purity

and free from passion." [J272.17-19] since Scripture testifies that Christ is clothed with frankincense the exalted soul is deemed worthy to participate in this divinity. [J280.10-12] The soul then is capable of bearing the fruit of the Spirit. [J272]

9.4 THE CHURCH

Y. Cattin, in his comment on mysticism and the institutional church brings out their relationship by pointing out that, "every mystical experience which claims to be Christian is also required to be submitted to the demands of the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of the Christian community".⁷ This comment serves to highlight the context in which the mystical experience of the Christian is perceived and finds its meaning.

For Gregory, it is not just the mystical experience that is put to the ~~test~~, it is the whole concept of anthropology not just some isolated sequences of experience of the divine, therefore his mysticism has a tripod of meaning, to the experience per se, to the anthropological pronouncements and the ecclesial control. And this we see Gregory focuses in on the doctrine of Christ:

- i. The experience is that of the Incarnate Christ indwelling in man.
- ii. The anthropological pronouncement is that of the restoration of the true image of God who is Christ.
- iii. The ecclesial control comes in the form of placing the experience solidly in the context of the community of believers, the body of

Christ.

Right from the beginning in Homily seven, Gregory takes pain in differentiating the questing soul and the church. The Canticle text has the Bride saying to the daughters of Sion, urging them to behold the glory of King Solomon's crown. (Canticle 3:11) This, Gregory takes to mean the universal Church adorned with the saints of many gifts: "The bride says that her spouse rejoices and delights in his crown of nuptial adornment, for the bridegroom rejoices when he takes the Church as his own dwelling crowned with the virtues of distinguished members." [J214] Gregory insists that the exalted Bride imitates her Lord in wishing all men to be saved and come to the recognition of the truth. [J215] That is the reason behind her urging the daughters of Sion to behold the Church as they can find salvation there. The Bridegroom praises the Bride because "truly the bride becomes a companion of the Lord's goodness since she drew near to God through love" [J215] as befitting the Canticle text: "Behold, you are fair, my companion, behold, you are fair!" (Canticle 4:1) Presumably, this is because the Bride not only progressed in her virtue but because she begins to acquire the love for mankind by imitating her Lord's *φιλανθρωπία*.

From Canticle 4:1b onwards, there seems to be an exegetical shift of character as Gregory reverts back to the description of the Church he has begun while allegorizing Solomon's litter. The text shifts to the description of the anatomy of a female figure. "Your eyes are as doves ..." etc. The shift is subtle and can be easily overlooked because the Canticle text seems to

have no break between calling the companion fair and describing the fairness thereof. But in Gregory's homily, there is a clean break between the two in J216.2 and J216.3ff, indicating that Gregory intends to separate the title of fair companion (which is attributed to the soul) and the female anatomy figure (which is attributed to the Church).

And then towards the end of Homily seven, i.e. at the end of the exposition of the ecclesiastical meaning of the female anatomy, Gregory reverts back to describing the soul/human nature as dying and rising with Christ, and calling the soul again, "You are fair, my companion, and there is no spot in you". (Canticle 4:7)

Thus with Homily seven, there is a double narrative about a double journey: that of the soul ascending in the context of the Church, and that of the Church growing by the example of the exalted saints in it.

The journey is even more striking when Gregory attempts to parallel the experience of the Church with that of the soul, "At the beginning, the assembly was dark from idolatry before it became the Church ... it lived far from the knowledge of the true God and was separated by a great gulf of ignorance." [J205.6-9, parallelling Homily Two, Chapter Two 2.2.2] The sin of idolatry and ignorance pertains to the nature of the Church called out of darkness to be the holy people of God. It is here that Gregory begins to adopt Origen's identification of the Bride (in Canticle 1:5) as the Church consisting of both the Jews and Gentiles. But the radical difference here is that whereas in Origen's exposition of Canticle 1:5 sees the Bride's blackness as lowly origin of the Gentile Church confronting the Jewish

Church, appealing for harmony within,⁸ here in Homily seven, Gregory sees the Israel as closing her eyes, "to the light and refused any participation in the good", so the Gentile Church, "having washed off their darkness by the mystical washing", is being led to God." [J205]

The result of the response to the light of the Incarnation is that the redeemed become the materials with which the temple of God is built, and these are equated to the many gifts of the Spirit released through the transformation of sinners to saints.

The Bride/Soul who has tasted the goodness of God directs the seekers of truth to behold the "marvelous sight" of the Church, i.e. the harmonious functioning of the church for the common good.

The soul utters the unutterable because it contains that which cannot be contained, and if it continues to live by the evidence of its experience, that the person has the responsibility to proclaim to those who only hears of the experience/journey, thus world either refute the experience altogether or admire such experience that it creates a longing in the hearers to pursue the self-same experience themselves, such is true of Gregory's description of the relation of the accompanying young maidens. They are yet to be engaged in the same journey, and before setting out they ask to be able to study the itinerary of the planned journey.⁹ These hearers "ask to see" ("show me") before going to see.

The relating of the narrative of the spiritual journey of the soul must be validated by a common authority of both the soul in question and the hearers of this experience of the spiritual journey, it is essential to be

credible, therefore it needs to "be developed on the basis of a critical authority which is accepted by both".¹⁰ Here the authority is the words of the bridegroom for the bride, as well as the way in which the Bride speaks of the Groom.

The discourse of the bride/soul to the hearers, because it is an experience and a vision, cannot be totally related as a philosophical or theological treatise, it is a narrative discourse, literary and poetic, designed not to reveal the ontological reality, for it could not, but to induce desire in the hearers to launch into this journey.

In summary, the marvelous sight that we behold in the Universal Church is the way each member works together to produce the witness of Christ: Ascetic way of life and a life of contemplation is stressed; teaching is of paramount importance not only for growth in the spiritual journey, but also to counter heresy that would damage the church; but generally the body of Christ is a self-denying organism that not only "breathes in" (by the process of indwelling) Christ but breathes out sweet exhortation of the Holy Spirit. Throughout humility is stressed. But by participation in the divinity through participation in the life and death of the Incarnate Christ, does the Church see her true identity as the Body of Christ.

Remarkably this also parallels the description of the ascent of the soul as possessing such attributes in a personal way as in the individual soul. Homily nine (chapter Three, 3.3) makes this abundantly clear. Again ascetic way of life is stressed; the self-denying aspect in the personal life is such that as it is divinized, it gives off an odour of comely fragrance. The Bride

teaches by her example of ascent^t and always points to her source, the Bridegroom and thus lead others to him.

9.5 TO BE LIKE THE ARCHETYPE

Gregory uses several terms to draw out the essence of the soul's search for its archetypal beauty: our transformation into what is divine [J250.14-15], the aim of the virtuous life is participation in God [J280.1]; the end of a virtuous life is likeness to God [J271.11]. All these represent his theme for this division of the Homilies.

The description of the mount of the King in Homily Three where the soul prepares for divine indwelling (Chapter Two, 2.3.3) sees a development in which that divine indwelling becomes a reality in Homily seven (the Chapter, 3.1.2):

"... the person thus bearing God in himself is a litter where God sits. According to the holy Paul, no longer does such a person live for himself, but he has Christ living in him and gives proof of Christ speaking in himself (2Cor. 13.3). This person is rightly called a litter who is borne about by Christ and carried by him." [J207.7-13]

The soul is drawn to the beauty and becomes beautiful by her own noble choice [J215] so that it seems it is possible to be like the Archetype. But the likeness is never confined in self-glorying pride but imitates the archetype's self-denying spirit and thus becomes a self-denying organism. In the imagery of the breast as twin fawns feeding among the lilies (Canticle 4:5), Gregory describes those who are being fed by the

nourishment which is incorruptible. And like a mother suckling her infant, they "do not shut up grace in herself but gives the tent of the Word to those in need, thereby providing nourishing food for her children." [J242.10-13] This provides Gregory with an occasion of seeing the beautified soul in action. Just like his archetype, who by incarnating in human flesh shows his love for mankind, the human person in his exalted state and having the divinity in him cannot but imitate his archetype in reaching out to fellow seekers and point them to the right path. Those who partakes of the sweet fruit becomes nourishing food for others: "The bride first enjoyed the apple's sweet fruit saying, "And his fruit was sweet to my taste." Then she herself becomes the lovely, sweet fruit offered to the husbandmen for his enjoyment." [J304.8-9] The enjoyment of the husbandmen/Bridegroom of this fruit is the pleasure of being able to transform the Bride into an obedient soul. Like St. Paul, "being fragrant through purity and detachment he becomes a scent of life to those who are saved." [J307.10-12] Thus Gregory puts the ascent of the soul solidly in a social and ecclesiastical context.

Being the exalted soul in the church means mutual nourishment and mutual exhortation on the path to perfection with like minded souls.

On the part of the soul, it is able to point others to Christ, the Bridegroom, whom she desires and imitates with the desire for all to be saved and launch on this restoring journey to Beauty and perfection. And because it is in like-minded environment, it can foster fellowship and communion with fellow souls in flight. Thus the ascent is not seen as the

"Alone to the Alone".

On the part of the Church, she by her teaching leads others on their paths to perfection. Because of her nature as the Body of Christ she provides nourishment for the soul in flight in the ultimate manifestation of the divinizing act: the eucharist. Through the eucharist the human person is engulfed in the process of divinisation, body and soul.

As in the first division of the Homilies, this division ends with the imagery of the divine night. The inebriation of the divinising act in the eucharist gives a sensation of lulling after a hearty meal. This, Gregory sees as entering into sleep, but a watchful sleep: When the soul goes beyond its footing in material things, all sense faculty becomes a hindrance, it is therefore abandoned, the effect is like the sensation of sleep. But because the soul is trained in its ascent to perceive vision in darkness, putting to sleep all senses, the heart's action becomes pure:

"Therefore, when the soul enjoys only the contemplation of Being, it will not arise for those things which effect and by naked, pure insight, the soul will see God in a divine watchfulness." [J314]

The soul has advanced so high that union becomes a reality, the vision of God leads to union with and that is the stage described in the last division of the Homilies (Homilies eleven to fifteen).

NOTES TO CHAPTER NINE

1. See I.M. Shea, *Church*, op. cit.
2. Ibid., p31.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p30.
5. See Chapter Eight, 8.3.2.
6. Harrison, *Grace*, op. cit. p126.
7. Y. Cattin, "The Christian Rule of Mystical Experience", in *Mysticism and the Institutional Crisis*, eds. C. Duquoc and G. Gutiérrez (Concilium, London: SCM Press, 1994.)
8. Or. Com II, Lawson, pp92-107.
9. Y. Cattin, art. cit., p6.
10. Ibid.

CHAPTER TEN

THE REMAKING OF MAN: THE PATH TO UNION (HOMILIES ELEVEN TO FIFTEEN)

With the beginning of this division of the Homilies, we enter yet another phase of the soul's ascent. We can see the expanding vision of Gregory for the soul's journey. It is only with the mind of greatest imaginings that Gregory seldom repeat himself and at every advancing phase sees new dimensions in his exploration of the theme of the remaking of man. The necessity of recycling his thought on Epektasis is the major feature in his presentation of mystical anthropology, every stage ends with a new beginning, yet every stage is ever ascending, so that we have a picture of thought, not of a cyclical repeating, but of a spiral ascending. The journey seems to come back to the beginning, yet it is a new beginning advancing upwards.

10.1 THE PRESENT STATE OF THE BRIDE

The present exalted state of the Bride at this new stage in the beginning should be content with her elevated station, but as it turns out Gregory has more to say on why she can never be satiated. Two aspects come back to haunt her as she poises herself to advance further: sin and the gulf between the created and uncreated.

10.1.1 The Persistence of Sin

It would seem that having advanced thus far, the Bride would have left her sin behind and becomes immune towards it as she increasingly detaches herself from material passions. But Gregory reminds us of an important warning for the soul in search of perfection: "The ascent to God always indicates something unbecoming in the bride." [J360.10-12] It is as if a layer of dirt is removed only to discover that yet more dirt is hidden underneath. Gregory gives some illustrations:

"As for those who practice virtue, you can see some dead to one passion but alive to others. We observe some putting intemperance to death, but they still foster pride or other passions destructive to the soul such as cupidity, anger, ambition, love of honour, or anything else of the sort. If these evil passions abide in the soul, one cannot show myrrh on one's fingers, for mortification and estrangement from evil do not extend throughout one's life." [J344.13 - J₃45.1]

Thus the higher the ascent, the greater is the sin in man exposed. Gregory seems to indicate that no one is immune because of the inherent free choice in man. But the exposure of the sin in man ultimately leads to carthasis because the doctrine of evil is such that evil replaces where good is absent, "A blow is truly given to virtue when evil has its day ... Once these evil are destroyed, our better part will prosper." [J346.10-16] Even after the decisive intervention of Christ, evil does not disappear altogether, it still hold^s human nature in its grasp.¹ Therefore mortification of the bodily passions is a constant battle that every believer is called to engage.

Again, this, according to the scheme of things, does not lead to a

cyclical repeating of mortification and further recovery of more sin, but a spiral ascending of gradually stamping down recovered sin, so that the Bride can say that she no longer desire to take up the rejected garment of skin, "but she is content with the one tunic which she put on by a rebirth from above ..." [J328.15-16] And this rebirth is equated with the indwelling of Christ,

"By stripping off the old man and by removing the veil from her heart, the bride opened a way for the Word. Upon his entrance, the soul makes him her garment according to the Apostle's bidding that he strip off the fleshly garment of the old man and put on the tunic created according to God in holiness and righteousness. He says that Jesus is this garment." [J328.1-12]

10.1.2 The Gulf between the Created and Uncreated

It is by now a common feature in Gregory that the more advanced the Bride ascends, the implication is that she should be stepping ever closer to her beloved, the more Gregory would stress the impossibility to bridge the gulf between them. This serves to safeguard the idea of fusion with the divine as the eminent description of intimate union draws near.

The occasion of the beloved putting his hand through the hole in the door (Canticle 5:4) brings out the point succinctly, it is because, "human nature is not able to contain the infinite, unbounded divine nature, ... Every soul endowed with the faculty of reason is struck by the wonderful deeds of the divine hand which transcends our human capacity, for the divine nature effecting such wonders can neither be grasped nor contained." [J337] Indeed

if human beings through their enquiring mind cannot hope to understand the wonder of creation, how can he comprehend God who lies beyond them?

The inability on the Bride's part to manifest the ineffable divinity does not however stop the Bride from leading the seekers of truth to the divine, this she does through God's manifestation in flesh. Thus the Uncreated wills himself to grace his divine presence in the Created, (see Chapter four 4.3.3) so it seems that the Incarnation becomes once again important in the path to union with God by leading the soul through Christ's own manifestation in the flesh. It is only when the divine wills it that the gulf can be crossed.

10.2 THE ROLE OF THE INCARNATION

If the previous section is followed, then as Gregory himself states: God is only knowable in so far as embodied in Christ [J338; J381; J384], then our mind can never be led up to the incomprehensible and infinite God until it has grasped by the faith in the thing seen, and the thing seen is the incarnate Christ.²

But it is precisely because Christ is both Created and Uncreated that the manifestation of God to man can take place. In a lengthy explanation, Gregory again brings out the role of the Incarnation:

"We say that part of him is uncreated. It is eternal, exists before the ages, and is the creator of all; on the other hand, his created part administers to us, since it has been formed according to the lowliness of our body ... We say that in the beginning was the Word. He was always with God and the Word was uncreated, without whom nothing was made. The

Word was always with God and was God. Through him all things were made. Christ was created, that is, he became flesh and dwelt among us. His incarnation clearly reveals his glory, namely, that God, the only-begotten God in the Father's bosom, appeared in human flesh ..." [J380.15 - J381.9]

The important role of the Incarnation is to reveal that glory, "since Christ, then, is uncreated and before all ages, eternally incomprehensible and totally ineffable, that which appeared to us through flesh allowed something of him to be known. [J381.10-12] Yet not only to reveal that glory, but also for the salvation of man that Christ comes in the flesh [J381.19 - J382.6; Chapter four, 4.3.2]. So in virtue of his Createdness, man can know the Uncreated. But the distinctiveness of the Incarnation is stressed as Christ's createdness is radically different from man's, in his Virgin birth, a new form of birth which undergo no birth pangs [J388] and in his sinlessness. Because there are no birth pangs, sin and pleasure is absent in the birth of Christ, the Virgin conceived her child with joy, thus he brought joy to a grieving humanity who inherited sorrow through childbirth in sin. Because he is sinless, he could ^aled the sinful to a state of detachment and apatheia. [J389]

10.3 IMAGERIES OF INDWELLING

The imageries that Gregory concentrates on, as the occasion of the flow of the Cantic text requires, are the imagery of the fountain and the imagery of wounding, which are used in previous stages but the meaning is yet again being intensified.

10.3.2 Imagery of the Fountain

It seems that from our analysis of this imagery in Chapter nine, 9.3.2, there is a satiety of indwelling, a perfect union of the image and the Archetype when the Bride is called, "the fountain of living water", the very name for the Fountain which is Christ himself. But Gregory is cautious in his description of fusing identity, there is a distinction between the two. The Bride can never claim to be the source, even when others look to her for the source of living water. And this is explicated more fully in Homily eleven.

Gregory starts off by stating that, "Hitherto the soul understands only what she has understood, but what she still does not know is infinitely greater than what she has already comprehended. Because of this, the bridegroom often appears to the soul; although not present to her sight, he promises the bride by his voice that he will appear." [J321.1-5] He then employs the imagery of the fountain to elaborate on his point, drawing out an important conclusion. The fountain that rose from the earth at the beginning of creation has endless stream of water gushing forth and bubbling out. In the same way,

"The person looking at the divine, invisible beauty will always discover it anew since he will see it as something newer and more wondrous in comparison to what he had already comprehended. He continues to wonder at God's continuous revelation; he never exhausts his desire to see more because what he awaits is always more magnificent and more divine than anything has seen." [J321.16-25]

The imagery brings with it the epistemological concept of the inexhaustible abundance of divine life. But as V.E.F. Harrison has aptly

observed, to know God is to participate in him,³ and to participate in him is the corollary of divine indwelling, we can then agree with Harrison that for Gregory, "Yet however much we receive, the divine nature which is the source of that life, like the spring buried deep in the earth, remains hidden from us".⁴

Having said that, it doesn't stop Gregory from looking at the Bride's exalted state from the point of those who desire perfection. What his exalted exclamation says about the Church, "he who sees the Church sees Christ", the same could be proclaimed about the Bride's exalted state, when once again the imagery of gushing living water is again employed in Homily twelve.

The imagery is intimately connected with Moses striking the rock in order to receive a flowing stream in the desert. (Exo. 17:6) In *De Vita Moysis* he comments on this event and draws out the implication thus,⁵

"It is not difficult to harmonize the sequence of the history with spiritual contemplation. He who left the Egyptian behind dead in the water, was sweetened by the wood, was delighted in the apostolic springs, and was refreshed by the shade of the palm trees, is already capable of receiving God. For *the rock*, as the Apostle says, *is Christ*, who is moistureless and resistant to unbelievers, but if one should employ the rod of faith he becomes drink to those who are thirsty and flows into those who receive him, for he says, I and my Father shall *come to him and make our home with him*."

Here drinking is explicitly identified with the flowing stream from the rock, which is Christ, flowing into the soul that receives him and thus receives the indwelling of God within itself.⁶

But in *In Canticum Cantorum*, the imagery is transferred to the Bride,

"Observe that height to which the bride has run. The bride thus received a blow like the flint [sic. rock] Moses struck so that she might stream forth for those thirsty after the Word."
[J367.16 - J368.1]

The identification with Christ is striking. But the exalted state of the Bride does not veil her Createdness. Her beauty has one specific purpose, to point others to the Archetypal Beauty, just as the fact that she is identify^{id} with the rock gushing streams in order to nourish those who thirst not for her, but after the Word.

10.3.2 The Imagery of Wounding

The key Biblical reference is St. Paul's exhilarated words, "I bear the marks of Christ in my body." (Galations 6:17) According to the Canticle text, as the Bride goes out in search of her beloved, the watchmen in the city found her. They smote her and wound her. (Canticle 5:7, Homily twelve) As is a custom in Gregory's exposition, something good would come out of this seemingly aggressive act of the watchmen. Compared with the earliest version of such coercion on the part of the brothers who have fought in her and forced her to be a guard in the vineyard (Canticle 1:6), the Bride

has left all the ugliness of violence and darkness behind. Her ascent is such that anything that is inflicted on her only mean the penetration of grace that comes from a loving act. So the wound, as the wound of love in Homily four,⁷ is accepted with gratitude, not without a sense of accomplishment, as she is deemed worthy to receive the divine wounding.

The imagery starts with Proverbs 23.13, "If you strike [sic, the child] with a rod, he will not die". [J361] "He will not die", taken at face value, means Immortality,⁸ quoting several Biblical texts⁹ Gregory sees the image of the rod as causing cure by striking, as for example, in Deut. 32:29, "I will strike and I will make life to live." The Shepherd's Psalm in fact consoles us and say, "Your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4), if this paradoxical way of curing by striking is evident in Scripture, there is no reason why the wound inflicted on the Bride should not be looked upon as a process of healing as well, "it is good to be struck by the rod from which comes an abundance of good things". [J362.12-14] So when the Bride says, "the guards smote her and wounded me", she boasts about her further advancement to on high. [J365.8-10]

And finally, the imagery of wounding is merged with that of the fountain in the exposition of Moses striking the rod and saw waters flow out. The divine rod has penetrated deep within the soul effecting healing but more importantly the blow is also to produce a stream for those thirsting for the Word. Thus the apostle can say proudly that, "I bear the marks of Christ in my body;" what is weak Christ perfects in virtue (2Cor. 12:9, J366.5-6); by the forceful removal of the veil, the soul's beauty is

revealed, no longer overshadowed by a covering; and by dying daily (ICor. 15:13) he partakes of new life, and surges forth without satiety, urges on by the desire for incorruptible beauty. Thus finally, the overwhelming sense of grace pervades the soul's journey, the veil is removed for her so that like Isaiah's experience, she could contemplate the divine beauty unhindered. But the wound also frustrates because though vision unhindered, her yearning for the divine beauty can be contemplated but cannot be grasped, "but the veil of despair is removed when the bride learns that the true satisfaction of her desire consists in always progressing in her search and ascent: when her desire is fulfilled, it gives birth to a further desire for the transcendent." [J369.22 - J370.3]

With this final imagery, Gregory effectively combines all his mystical contemplation, of the divine indwelling in the restoration of man. Grace effects in man the desire to seek for the beauty that he has lost, this beauty is no longer elusive, but manifests itself in the Bridegroom's divine beauty. But that desire finds no satiety, but true satisfaction comes from ever increasing desire, thus he "will always see more of her beloved's incomprehensible beauty throughout eternity.

[J370.5-6]

10.5 THE PATH TO UNION

This division begins with what seems like the anticlimax in the soul's ascent. The high point in Homily Ten of sober inebriation and

watchful sleep seems to point towards a trough where everything seems to require a new beginning, and this is exactly what Gregory has in mind in his doctrine of Epektasis: it is as if scaling great heights only serve to prepare oneself for a beginning yet again. Everything that has been experienced thus far serves to prepare the soul for a new beginning in the journey, for "she does not yet receive the Word standing at her door". [J320.3-4]

So this division begins where the last division left off, the experience of darkness where God is, where the soul was hemmed in on all side by the divine darkness. Forsaking everything, the only thing left for her contemplation is the unseen and unattainable in which God dwells. [J323.1-6]

But the nature of the ascent is that the Bride's contemplation serves her in such a way that her experience becomes the beginning of yet another new discovery of the divine beauty. And the key to unlock the divine mysteries is the grace of being accepted by God in intimate relationship.

All preparations for the new beginning helps to create a deeper understanding of God's gifts in terms of Scripture and Biblical teaching; baptism and above all the putting on of the new garments. Scripture and teaching, like dew on the Bridegroom, is now seen as a gradual deepening of the Bride's knowledge of her Beloved in preparation for the fuller revelation; baptism and washing and the new garments all point to the irreversibility of the process of ascent once the soul has gone through carthasis, but most of all, because of the indwelling of Christ in the soul, it

is beautified and is kept from being overcome by temptation. And because of the overpowering example of the Incarnation, the soul is led into the right path in which she perceives the union with her Beloved impending.

And it is at this stage that the soul begins to realise the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in its path of ascent. As we have indicated in Chapter four, the doctrine of synergism emerges at this stage. This is because the soul is now advanced enough to co-operate with the Holy Spirit in order to bring about the required divinization. Using the Pauline formulation, "When a person turns to the Lord, his veil will be removed. The Lord is the Spirit," (II Cor. 3:16-17) Gregory then sees this transformation as effected in two ways. The Spirit's power is called upon to, "breathe on us and put us into motion the waves of our thoughts". [J342.3-4] This sounds very positive until it is realized once again that Gregory's never lets off the grip on that one great theme, *epektasis*. For the Bride says, "I sought him, but found him not." (Canticle 5.6)

The Bride nevertheless goes out pursuing in the footsteps of the Beloved, and it is here that we again encounter the second of the themes of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit: the removal of the veil and the wound that effects healing. The Corinthian passage comes to the rescue in that we see that work of removal of the veil as the Spirit effecting in the Bride a yet higher vision for the spiritual, "her eyes are free and unhindered to contemplate her beloved." [J360.18-20] but, "the bride will always see more of her beloved's incomprehensible beauty throughout all eternity." [J370.6-8]. And as we have indicated in Chapter four, 4.2.6; the

doctrine of synergism is brought into play: it is the Bride who freely removes her garments but it requires the Holy Spirit to uncover her vision for God. The Bride is now compared to the Rock in the Wilderness on which Moses struck to obtain water. The Living Source produces the living water in the soul because he indwells in the soul, but without the rod, which is the Holy Spirit, no water would gush out. Thus the identification with the Archetype needs the transforming power of the Spirit.

The maidens, seeing the exalted state of the Bride is stirred to beseech the Bride to, "give us, you who are filled with loveliness and 'beautiful among women,' a means to recognise him." [J380.1-2] But no word or imagery can fully describe the One whom she pursued.

Thereupon, the Bride launches into a description which must place its importance on the resemblance to the Bridegroom. This image she finds in the Church. Gregory exploits the concept of the Church as the Body of Christ to the full. The Canticle text gives full and imaginative description of the Bridegroom, but to Gregory it would deny everything that he says about the ineffability of God if these descriptions were to apply to the divine. So some qualifications must be made. The Church is not Christ, but the Scriptural notion is true: Christ is the Head of the Church. The gulf between the Church and Christ is the same as between the Created and the Uncreated. But the indwelling and divinizing act of Christ is such that the more the Church receive^s her Lord the more she becomes the receptacle of divinity, so much so that,

"Whoever looks at the visible world and understands the wisdom that has been made manifest by the beauty of

creatures can make an analogy from the visible beauty, the fountain of beauty whose emanation established all living beings in existence. Similarly, whoever views the world of this new creation in the Church see in it him who is all in all. This person is then led by faith through what is finite and comprehensible to knowledge of the infinite." [J385.22-J386.9]

Nevertheless, the Church executes the attributes of her Lord in such a way that the Body of Christ is made whole through her limbs. And by the limbs of the Church, Gregory takes to mean the individual members in the Church:

"How blessed are those limbs which made the bridegroom so desirable! Perfect in every good, the bridegroom's limbs forms a desirable beauty composed of all his members. Not only is he desirable in the eyes, hands and locks, but also in his feet, legs and throat. No member is less account because of another's superiority." [J426.1-8]

Two important point are observable here. All members are viewed as equally crucial to the understanding of the redemptive work of Christ. In Homily fifteen, Gregory attempts at differentiating four major types in humanity that begin their journey of ascent: there are those who approach out of fear; there are those who come out of fear of punishment; more praiseworthy are those who pursue purity for its own sake; but the most exalted way is to progress through love alone. To the last category belongs the Bride. The division into categories in by no means to discriminate, but the purpose is to exhort every member to the higher good: each according to his own measure.

But the above quotation more importantly indicates the direction in which Gregory is leading us: that perfect love unites all. Here Gregory's

vision of the Bride's ascent increasing takes on a corporate form. No longer is the Bride seen in isolation as the lonely soul in search of its own perfection. Its own destiny lies with and must be understood in the context of his incorporation into Christ *and* his Church.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TEN

1. Mosshammer, "Evil and Non-Being", art. cit. 157.
2. Macleod, "Mysticism", 364.
3. Harrison, *Grace*, pp24-60.
4. Ibid., p122.
5. Moysis II, 136.
6. Cf. Harrison, *Grace*, p124.
7. See Chapter Eight, 8.3.4.
8. See our analysis in Chapter Four, 4.2.7.
9. E.g. Deut. 32:29; Psa. 23:4.

PART IV

GREGORY OF NYSSA AND ORIGEN ON THE SONG OF SONGS

CHAPTER ELEVEN

GREGORY OF NYSSA AND ORIGEN ON THE SONG OF SONGS

Origen follows a tradition of spirituality which uses the language of mysticism deriving from Scripture, philosophic data and Hellenistic imagery, but manages to enrich that tradition by expressions of his own. After him, his themes are repeated by generations of mystics who used them to express their own experience.¹

On the nature and destiny of man the tripartite source is utilized throughout to explicate man's goal in life as the realization of his true nature, which is divine and his duty as the restoration of his original pure state and likeness to God.²

The follow analysis is to indicate very briefly how Gregory's mystical anthropology defers^{to} or is influenced by Origen's understanding of the soul's ascend. The obvious way in the present thesis is to compare and contrast Gregory's exposition of the Song of Songs with that of Origen's commentary and homilies, existing in fragments though they are, on the Canticle text. The advantage is first of all of space and scope. Origen's mystical contemplation of the soul's ascent and union with God, although a constant theme in many of his works, nonetheless found its most profound expression in his exposition of the Canticle text. And as we also concentrates on Gregory's mystical theology in the same text, it seems appropriate to put the works of the two great Fathers side by side, and by thus doing, an immediate contrast in spirituality might clearly emerge.

11.1 PRINCIPLES AND DOCTRINES BEHIND THE SOUL'S ASCENT

We shall attempt first to summarize very briefly, without doing Origen injustice, drawing insights from secondary materials, Origen's theology that undergird his mystical contemplation in the Canticle text.

11.1.1 Scripture Interpretation

Allegorism in the interpretation of Scripture has been in use at Alexandria long before the time of Origen, and "Origen continued the Alexandrian tradition of allegorizing the Scriptures, finding the true and deeper meaning of the Scriptures in the philosophical concepts which lie beneath its historical husk, and thus attempted to bring into accord, systematically, the philosophy of Christianity with its documents".³

Hanson comments that, "the fact that Origen divided the interpretation of Scripture into three senses is almost as well known as the fact that Caesar divided Gaul into three parts."⁴

This tripartite system, literal (carnal), moral (psychic) and spiritual (intellectual) senses is scarcely carried out in his exegesis, but a system corresponding to the dichotomy of letter and spirit is more useful to Origen's task. In his work on the Canticle text, he indeed has a three-fold program, but with a slight difference: the literal (epithalamium) and a two-fold allegorization: one applies to Christ and the Church, the other applies

to the soul and the Word. For Origen, Scripture is inspired text, there is little room for historical perspective, the requisite uniformity of doctrine can be maintained only by whole-sale allegorization.⁵ The text of the Song of Songs is exactly suited to Origen's hermeneutic principles. The Canticle has a literal sense but this pale; into non-existence, as Origen sees in the text the unutterable mysteries of divine love as accommodated to human understanding by the language of human love.⁶ This point is significant when we contrast it with Gregory's understanding of the principles of allegorical interpretation.

11.1.2 The Image and Likeness of God

Origen, in his interpretation of Gen. 1:26-27, states that man was created in the image of God, but has not, as yet, attained likeness to God.⁷ By the image of God in man is meant his rational soul which has a certain kinship or affinity with God, thus able to attain perfection or likeness to God. But this perfection, because it is not inherent in man, must be acquired through man's personal efforts, by imitation of the Logos.⁸ In his original state this is not only possible but a reality. H. Crouzel asserts that the principle that like is known only by like is a fundamental axiom of Origen's mysticism.⁹ On this principle, we see that in Origen, man is the recipient of God's image by participation. It is the participation of the Logos by our logos.¹⁰ However, man became weary of contemplating God, and thus became estranged from Him and was clothed in a human body.¹¹ So

instead of progressing towards the likeness of God, he turned to evil and began to take on a resemblance to the devil.¹² The Logos, seeing this predicament in man, was filled with pity and concern, became incarnate, and made it possible for man to recover his knowledge and fellowship with the Logos. "Through the gracious power of the Logos, all people are able to grasp the mysteries of transcendent philosophy ... As a philosopher and a Christian, [Origen] defended cosmological the individual journeys and meanderings of all people towards God guided by the individual care and instruction of the incarnate Logos."¹³ This is because, according to Origen, man lacks the ability to obtain union with God through his own insight or self-knowledge.¹⁴ It is through the grace of the Logos that the soul is led gradually from the knowledge of self to do battle against sin, by ascetic practices, to the mystical ascent and finally to union with the divine.¹⁵

11.1.3 Attitude Towards the Body

Ladner's comment on Origen's attitude towards the body is a commonplace indictment of Origen's anthropology as being too spiritual in tone,

"Like other late Platonists, Origen had cut through the delicate weave of man's composite nature; if he did not as a christian, to whom the Incarnation of the Son of God was essential, consider the body the source of evil, he nevertheless assumed that corporeal life was only a punitive, pedagogical and redemptive consequence of creature's lapse from pure spirituality."¹⁶

But for Gregory, "the higher logic of the excellence of all of God's

creation, forbade his eliminating altogether the corporeal mode of existence from the beginning of the world and of Man."¹⁷

Origen's attitude towards the body is ambiguous. In describing the mind that is affected by the experience of the body in nausea at sea, and on land bodily fever renders it dull, he comments that, "for we human beings are animals composed of a union of body and soul, and in this way alone is it possible for us to live on earth."¹⁸

But when it comes to differentiate the earthly body and the "risen body", Origen has different theory. Origen maintains that the Stoic doctrine of cyclical conflagration and rebirth, since it postulates the rebirth of a new body which is identical with the old, is in error, whereas Christians hold that the risen body is not in all respects identical with the earthly and that once risen it is incorruptible.¹⁹ The soul has need of a body suited to the nature of the place it occupies, and in its risen state has no need of a material body, as only spiritual body is suited in the spiritual realm.²⁰

11.2 GREGORY AND ORIGEN ON THE SONG OF SONGS

In comparing the expositions of Gregory with Origen's, the first thing that becomes obvious is the imagery of the Bride and the Bridegroom is applied consistently to the divine-human relationship. Gregory himself mentions that he knows of Origen's work. In the prologue to his own exposition, Gregory says that, "although Origen laboriously applied himself to the Song of Songs, we too have desired to publish our efforts. Let no one

accuse us by referring to the Apostle's words, 'Each one shall receive his wages according to his labour'.[J13] The implication is that although Origen's work is widely accepted, it does not prevent another to do the same, yet able to contribute to the understanding of the Song of Songs in a way. And that Gregory intends to do: "I have taken some and added others where necessary." This taking of some and adding the others is basically how we see Gregory's work as compared to that of Origen's.

11.2.1 The Interpretation of the Song of Songs

Origen's tripartite system of literal (carnal), moral (psychic) and spiritual (intellectual) senses in allegorical interpretation is not followed in Gregory. Although Origen tends to fuse the moral and spiritual senses, resulting in a basic dichotomy of letter and spirit, in his commentary to the Song of Songs, he follows again his tripartite system, first giving^{en} the literal sense and then a two-fold allegorization: the Church and its relationship to Christ and the soul and its relationship to the word. Gregory assumes the literal sense as part of his spiritual meaning as the divinity of Christ cannot be understood apart from his incarnation in the flesh. Thus whereas Origen, following ancient Hellenistic allegorical writers,²¹ wishes to vindicate erotic connotations and defending them from ridicule by showing that they embody, under the veil of allegory, the most spiritual of messages and conceptions, Gregory sees allegory as a way of expressing the blending of letter and spirit. The model of the Incarnation is important as we have

indicated in Chapter five. Gregory does warn against seeing the Cantic text in an erotic way. But he also add a qualifying statement that for the Song of Songs, "what could be more paradoxical than to make nature purify itself of its own passions and teach detachment in words normally suggesting passion?" [J29] The important implication is that, not unlike the paradox in the act on God's part in the Incarnation, the text is indispensable to the formulation of the mystical ascent of the soul. The severe warning, unlike Origen's, applies to those who only see the Cantic text in the carnal way alone, without realizing the dual nature of the text that leads to the whole truth concerning man and his destiny.

11.2.2 Characters in the Song of Songs

Concerning the characters in the Song of Songs, we see there a definite resemblance in Origen's and Gregory's identification. For Origen, the Bride is both collective, representing the Church, and individual, representing the soul. Far from being opposed to each other, the dual identity links and complement each other: "The faithful soul is bride because she forms part of the Church which is Bride. If the progress of the soul in the likeness of Christ makes it more and more perfectly bride, the Church, the community of believers, also becomes more and more perfectly Bride."²² But this is as far as the resemblance of the two Fathers go.

Origen tends to switch his identification of the Bride at will. although it must be admitted that in his commentary, the soul is the predominant

representation, whereas in his homilies, the Church is the main concern.

Crouzel remarks on this switch that,

"In the majority of cases, taking first the Church as Bride and then the soul as bride, or vice versa, he explain the verse in an orderly way under both heads. There are few exceptions to that: some verses are interpreted in one of the two ways, in the others the two are more or less mingled and he passes imperceptibly from the one to the other, although the transition is well marked."²³

This remark serves to highlight the difference in approach in Gregory's understanding of the flow of the Canticle text. For Gregory, the consistency in identifying the Bride with the soul is maintained throughout his fifteen homilies. It is when he begins to see the restoration of all things in Christ that the destiny of the soul and the Church becomes one. And the Bride is then united with her Beloved, just like the soul and the Church both find their fulfillment united in Christ.

But this is consistent with Gregory's flow of thought on the soul in ascend[†]. Unlike Origen, the sequence and order in the soul's advance is of paramount importance in his exegesis of the Biblical text. No confusion of identity is allowed, all must advance in an orderly fashion so that union is achieved with the God who knows no confusion.

11.2.3 The Role of The Incarnation

Several verses of the Canticle text^{are} recognized as possessing the concept of the Incarnation in both Fathers. We shall select a few to highlight the role in which the Incarnation plays in the spirituality of each

Father.

The obvious place to begin with is the passage we discover to be most important to Gregory in relating the role of the Incarnation with the soul in ascent: Canticle 1:15-2:5.

The role of the Incarnation is taken with all seriousness in Gregory as representing the key to every stage in the Bride's ascent, for this see our exposition in Chapter Two, 2.4.4 to 2.4.6. As it turns out Origen also comments on that relationship, but to a much weaker extent. Commenting on Canticle 1:16: "overshadowing our bed," Gregory sees "bed" as the blending of human nature with the divine in the Incarnation. Origen also sees in the bed a divine condescension on Christ's part to "lay down" with the Bride, meaning the healing of the human body.²⁴ Gregory in fact goes a step further and lays claim that the Incarnation of Christ and the divinization of man follows the same mechanics.

But even more striking is the subtle difference in the next section of the exposition: "As the apple among the trees of the wood so is my beloved among the sons." (Canticle 2:3) Both Fathers recognize the radical difference in Christ, the apple tree, and the trees of the wood. Whereas Origen explains this in terms of Christ's teaching of wisdom as opposed to heretical teachings,²⁵ Gregory's distinction between the Created and Uncreated sees this as a gulf between the Incarnation and the divinization of man.

Thus we can initially conclude that whereas Gregory sees an immediate link between the Incarnation and the ascent to union with God;

Origen sees the Incarnation as the key to understanding of Scripture, and the understanding in turn becomes "the medium of union with the Word"²⁶

This is in fact confirmed in several passages quoted by A. Louth.²⁷ Gregory indeed also recognizes the importance of the mediation of the Scripture in revealing the role of the Incarnation much the same way as Origen. In expounding the imagery of the rock in Canticle 2:14, both see the rock as the coming of Christ in contrast to the wall, which Gregory takes to mean the Laws. But the interesting difference is that Gregory focuses in on "the Lamb, the blood and the Pasch", concentrating on spiritual growth in the understanding of Scripture concerning the Incarnation. Origen on the other hand sees the Incarnation as unlocking the prophecies about the last times²⁸. Louth brings to attention the role of the Incarnation in Origen will eventually pass away.²⁹ In commenting on "the shadow of the apple tree" (Canticle 2:3), Origen has this to say,

The shadow of the Law indeed afforded but slight protection from this heat; but the shadow of Christ, under which we now live among the Gentiles, that is to say, the faith of his Incarnation, affords complete protection... Yet the period of this shadow too is to be fulfilled at the end of the age; because, as we have said, after the consummation of the age we shall behold no longer through a glass and a riddle, but face to face."³⁰

Louth's comment is apt: "So the soul, it seems, passes beyond faith in the Incarnation in its ascent to God. The incarnation is only a stage. It would seem that Origen's Platonist presuppositions here are proof against the impact of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation: the

Incarnation is not really central, but simply a preliminary stage."³¹ This is in contradistinction to Gregory's formulation. The Incarnation not only gives assurance of salvation but also becomes the goal for the soul in ascent:

" However, the soul cannot be refreshed under the shadow of the tree of life unless she has an eager desire for it. You see that desire is placed in you to create a longing for the apple tree whose enjoyment is manifold for those who have approached it." [J119]

11.2.4 The Imageries of the Perfumes and the Wounding

Origen's use of the imagery of the perfumes is very rich. Commenting on Cantic 1:3, "The fragrance of thine ointments is above all spices," Origen draws on all available nuances concerning fragrances. But above all the verse speaks of the Incarnation, as the revelation in the Incarnation is far superior to the Law and the Prophets. As it turn out, Origen is pointing the Bride towards a better understanding of Scriptural revelation: the spiritual meaning of Scripture is above all moral and natural philosophy.³²

As for the stanza, "thy name is as ointment emptied out," it signifies the spreading of the Lord's name abroad: "for the sake of these young souls...He who was in the form of God emptied Himself...that He might no longer dwell only in the light unapproachable and abide in the form of God; but that Word might be made flesh, and so these maiden souls at the beginning of their progress might not only love Him but might draw near to Him."³³ The maidens are seen as the churches in search of the Way, by drawing near is meant to cleave to Him, being bound by the band of His love, by receiving the spiritual senses in order to perceive the divine

meaning.

Gregory's interpretation is decidedly more immediate as he sees in the perfumes the ability to transfer the fragrant scent. He capitalizes on this and draws out the concept of divine indwelling until the soul, receiving divinity in itself, proudly confesses that, "I am the odour of Christ." Origen takes this confession to mean the spread of the salvation of Christ by those who carry his name abroad.

But it is in the imagery of Wounding that we find the Fathers most imaginative. It is worth to quote Origen's thought in full:

"and the soul is moved by heavenly love and longing when, having clearly beheld the beauty and the fairness of the Word of God, it fell deeply in love with his loveliness and receives from the Word Himself a certain dart and wound of love. For this Word is the image and splendour of the invisible God, the Firstborn of all creation, in whom were all things created that are in heaven and on earth, seen and unseen alike. If, then, a man can so extend his thinking as to ponder and consider the beauty and the grace of all the things that have been created in the Word, the very charm of them will so smite him, the grandeur of their brightness will so pierce him as with a chosen dart- as says the prophet- that he will suffer from the dart Himself a saving wound, and will be kindled with the blessed fire of His love."³⁴

Again we see the soul is moved so as to create a desire to love and to know. Origen is not consistent in describing this epistemological wounding. From the above passage it is by contemplating nature and its beauty that the soul is struck by the pang of desire to know more. In his commentary on Cantic 2:5, the divine attributes are revealed and imparted in the soul: of wisdom, might, justice, goodness and lovingkindness and so forth.³⁵ In his homily, commenting on the same verse, Origen identifies the dart that

causes the wound as the teaching of the Divine Scripture.³⁶

The difference in Gregory's scheme is its consistency in viewing the imparting of the wound as the immediacy of the divine indwelling. In this sense, therefore, we can conclude that Gregory is the more mystical of the two Fathers, and we question whether Origen's contemplation can properly be viewed from the point of mystical experience.³⁷

11.2.5 Akolouthia and the Progress of the Soul

The idea of progress of the soul is common to all mystical writing, what defers is how the mystical writers view that progress. This is profoundly affected by the writer's own experience and his theological presuppositions.

We have already indicated that the single most important presupposition for Gregory is the distinction between the Created and the Uncreated. This creates insatiety in the soul and urges its progress without end. Every stage acquired is but a beginning for a further ascent. And the concept of akolouthia applies for that progress.

Origen's concept of the progress of the soul is attested in several of his works.³⁸ In Homily five on Exodus, the sequence of the movement of the Children of Israel has a spiritual counterpart in the moral ascent of the soul. In his homily twenty seven on Numbers, he again stress this progress: "The soul is on pilgrimage: it journeys on and makes stages, doubtless

because God has ordained them... therefore stages are those by which the soul journeys from heaven to earth."³⁹

All these are easily discerned because of the natural sequence of the text conceding a flow of historical events, but with the Song of Songs the historical sense is missing. So Origen finds his sequence in seeing the text as an epithalamium, thus creating a certain kind of drama in which the spiritual meaning can be perceived characters as if going on and off stage in this nuptial drama. But the drama seems to consummate itself at regular intervals.

K.J. Torjesen sees this happening especially clearly in Origen's two surviving homilies. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine Torjesen's claims, but suffice it to say that on examining the homilies ourselves, we find her claims to be basically sound. Hence we will only attempt to abstract her work here.⁴⁰

Origen organizes his homilies according to three preconceived stages of the progress of the soul: the purification from sin (exposition on Cant. 1:2a); the progress in knowledge in the Logos and the gradual restoring man's image of God in the Logos (exposition on Cant. 1:2b-9); and the anticipation of the coming perfection (exposition on Cant.1:10). This progress from purification to the final anticipation of full consummation is again repeated in homily two:

purification on Cant. 1:12-14; increase in knowledge on Cant.1:15-2:12; and perfection on Cant.2:13. The commentary is more complicated but the general stage from purification to illumination is also repeated

throughout.⁴¹

Two points can be discerned from this.⁴² The progress of the soul is from darkness to light. The sometime absence of the bridegroom is viewed as part of the process of purification and serve even to promote the desire for knowledge, frustrating at time but the soul is never put in darkness for long:

"And when [the Bride] has been adequately trained in that, she receives unto herself the Word Himself who was God and with God in the Beginning. He does not always stay with her, however, for that for human nature is not possible: He may visit from time to time, indeed, and yet from time to time she may be forsaken too by Him. that she may long for Him the more. But- taking the meaning of the verse before us- when she is visited by the Word, He is said to come to her leaping upon the mountains, that is, revealing to her the meaning of high and lofty truths of heavenly wisdom..."⁴³

So much so that Louth is able to comment that, " this is characteristic of Origen's spirituality, which knows nothing of the cloud, the dark night, found in the mysticism of others. His is a mysticism of light."⁴⁴ And S.L. Chase comments that, Origen's "sense of the soul's journey culminating in perfection undermines some of the radical tension between desire and fulfillment that Gregory builds into his concept of *akolouthia*."⁴⁵

Another point to be made is that Torjesen's investigation lead to the conclusion that in Origen, the soul's progress goes in an ever narrowing concentric circle growing towards the Source of Light in the centre. Gregory's scheme, however, sees the soul's progress grows in an ascending spiralling formation towards the Darkness where God is.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ELEVEN

1. H. Crouzel, *Origen*, trans. A.S. Worrall, (NY: Harper & Row Pub., 1989), for appreciation of Origen's mystical contribution see also A. Louth, *Mystical Tradition*, op. cit., pp36-51; *Origen*, trans. R.A. Greer, (London: SPCK, 1979), pp1-33; P. Grant, *Spiritual Discourse and the Meaning of Persons*, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994), pp46-67).
2. Cf. A. Tripolitis, *The Doctrine of the Soul in the Thought of Plotinus and Origen*, (NY: Libra Publishing, 1978), pp89-136, although Tripolitis insists on the preeminence of Scripture in Origen, she seems to assume this tripartite source as equal in influence throughout her analysis of Origen's theology.
3. Tripolitis, op.cit. p122.
4. Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, op.cit., p235.
5. In his commentary on Jeremiah, he says, "What has this history to do with me?" The answer would be: none, except in so far as it speak to me in a spiritual sense. See Hanson, op.cit. pp276-277. Recently scholars are looking at Origen's works more closely in order to find out whether this particular assertion of Origen is true to all his work. See especially, G. Bostock, "Allegory and the Interpretation of the Bible in Origen, JLT 1(1987), 39-53. Origen, for example, explicitly condemns those allegorists who removed the historical element; for this see H. Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition* (Oxford: OUP 1966), p112, where according to Chadwick, Origen knew, "the dangers of allegory in dissolving history into a timeless myth...he had before him the specter of gnostic exegesis." But in practice, it seems that Origen still very much renegades the historical sense to little significance.
6. Cf. Hanson, *Ibid.*, 226-228.
7. Cf. Con Cel iv. 30; de Princ. iii.6.1; Com Romans iv.5.
8. Cf. de Princ iii.6.1.
9. H. Crouzel and M. Simonetti, *Origène, Trité des Principes: Tome II* (SC, Paris 1978), p26.

10. Cf. H. Crouzel, *Theologie de l'image de Dieu chez Origène* (Paris:Aubier 1956), pp160-175.
11. Cf. Hom Gen i.13,15; iii.3.
12. Cf. Hom Gen i.15.
13. J.R. Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p46.
14. Cf. Con Cel vii. 23, 42-44; de Princ iii.2.2, 5.
15. Pro. Com II, Lawson p157. *SC 375, Livre II, §, 34*
16. Ladner, *Philosophical Anthropology*, p63. He sites Origen's *In Joannem* XX, 22(20), 182, Orig IV 355(GCS).
17. Ladner, Ibid.
18. Cf. de Princ i.1.6. For a general condemnation of Origen's attitude, see e.g. M.L. del Mastro, "Denial of the Flesh in Origen and Subsequent Implications," *Mystic Quarterly* 14(1988), 70-83. For a more balanced view see, M.J. Edwards, "Origen no Gnostic; or, on the Corporeality of Man," *JTS,NS* 43(1992), 21-37.
19. C. Cels. v.20-3. See H. Chadwick, "Origen, Celsus, and the Resurrection of the Body," *HTR* 41(1948), 83-102; M. Demura, "The Resurrection of the Body and Soul in Origen's *Contra Celsum*," *SP* (1993), 385-391.
20. C. Cels. vii.32f.
21. See for example Hanson, *Allegory*, Chapter Two.
22. Crouzel, *Origen* ,op.cit., p122.
23. Crouzel, *ibid*.
24. Or. Com III, Lawson, p173; Or. Hom II, Lawson, p291.
SC 376 Livre II, 2, 4-5 SC 376bis, Hom II, 4
25. Or. Com III, Lawson, p179-185.
SC 376 Livre III, 5, 1-21.
26. Cf. Louth, *Mystical Tradition*, op.cit., pp63-63.
27. We owe great dept to Louth, *ibid.*, in this respect and basically agree with his analysis.
28. *Ibid*.

29. Ibid., p65.
30. Or. Com III, Lawson, p184. *SC 376 Livre III, 5, 18*
31. Louth, *ibid.*
32. Or. Com I, Lawson, p70-73. *SC 375 Livre I, 3, 1-11*
33. Ibid., p75. *SC 375, Livre I, 4, 4-5*
34. Ibid., p29-30. *SC 375 Con Prol 2, 15-19*
35. Ibid., pp198-199. *SC 376 Livre III, 8, 13-15*
36. Ibid., p297. *SC 37bis, Hom III, 8*
37. This is but a tentative conclusion awaiting further investigation. Arguments for and against it are aplenty, see for example Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (Cambridge: CUP 1965), pp70-90; C.W. Macleod, "Allegory and Mysticism," *art.cit.*, 362-370.
38. See K.J. Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis*. (Ny: de Gruyter 1985); S.L. Chase, "'What Happens Next?': Biblical Exegesis and the Path of the Soul's Journey in Origen and Gregory of Nyssa," *The Patristic and Byzantine Review*, 33-45; R. Greer, *Origen* (NY: Paulist Press 1979), pp1-44.
39. Quoting R.E. Heine's translation in *Origen, Homilies on Genesis and Exodos*, (Washington: Catholic UP 1982, p251.
40. See Torjesen, *op.cit.*, pp77-96.
41. Admittedly this is difficult to judge due to the incompleteness of our source, nevertheless Torjesen does an excellent job in isolating the scheme of exegesis in Origen.
42. Unfortunately Torjesen does not pursue the implication of her discovery.
43. Or. Com III, Lawson, pp231-232. *SC 376, Livre III, 14, 10*
44. Louth, *op.cit.*, pp56-57.
45. Chase, *art.cit.*, p45.

PART V

MYSTICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE LIFE OF MACRINA

CHAPTER TWELVE

MYSTICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE LIFE OF MACRINA

In several passages of Gregory's works, he mentions specifically that he has never experienced mystical translation, say, of a mystic. The path of mankind on Earth should ideally lead to fuller participation in the Divine life; a life of virtue both opens out the opportunity and becomes the very substance of this participation, as he is changed "from glory to glory" to realize the true implication of himself as the image of God. This also implies the gradual union and communion with his incarnate Lord, the Bridegroom. The process is akin to the reverse order of God-indwelling in Christ at the Incarnation, the only difference is, with Christ, there was no time-lag, whereas with mankind, there is the continual process of "being created while ever changing for the better in its growth in perfection"[J174,6]. Yet Gregory is careful to avoid all reference to the unproductiveness and individual quest for union with "the One" as an end in itself. For him the ascent of the soul in fuller participation in the Divine life inevitably induces in itself the love for the soul of others, it is to others what Christ was to its nature [J443-J444], especially in the context of the Christian community, the Church, "thus the Word receives his bride's love, because in imitation of the Lord, she wishes all men to be saved and come to the recognition of truth"[J215,1-3].¹

All through his Homilies, Gregory avoids the mystical notion of fusion with "the One", always keeping close to his consistent Biblical doctrine of

the gulf between the Created and Uncreated. This leads to the suspicion of whether one can ever classify Gregory's system as mystical: there seems to be no possibility of ecstasy.² However Louth seems to think that contrary is the truth, "depending on how you view the heart of mysticism". Here he puts the focus on "an experience of immediacy with God Himself in love".³ Hence if love is "the wing" with which human nature uses to reach the Unreachable [J447], union in this manner could then be perceived in all its mystical implications. And this we see is the essence of his mystical anthropology: the wound of love that leads to the union in love.⁴ Yet, for Gregory, who uses the most aesthetic of words to describe this union in love, is adamant that he has yet to experience it in his life-time. In the prologue to the *De Vita Moysis*, he views himself as a spectator to "the Divine race along the course of virtue", exhorting, urging and encouraging the reader(s) from the spectator's stand. Yet again, coming from a writer who champions the very idea that whatever achievement in the path of perfection according to virtue only serve as the *beginning* of further ascent, it almost comes as no surprise to think as his beloved Apostle thought, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect;... forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal".⁵ His hesitation is in fact consistent with his anthropological mysticism. We look in vain in his works of his personal experience of the ascent of the soul.

However, it is my contention that his *Vita Macrinae* provides us with a fairly clear vision of how the soul can proceed in her ascent to perfection

as described in Gregory's mystical anthropology. In Macrina, Gregory's own sister, we see a true model of humanity finding her true image of God in her nature, which is the essence of her brother's mystical anthropology.

12.1 WHO WAS MACRINA?

Macrina has become such a mythic figure that almost every role or model of an exemplary woman in the early Church is perceived through her person. There is her kinship with St. Thecla, the would-be martyr in the Apocryphal record of *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* and the third century work of Methodius, *The Banquet of the Ten Virgins*.⁶ Just before the time of her birth, Macrina's mother had a vision in her dream of "a person of greater than human shape and form appeared to be addressing the infant [in her hands] by the name of Thecla". This happened three times before she awoke and gave birth to her child whose given name was Macrina, but her secret name was Thecla, "not so much indicating how the child should be named, but foretelling a life of the child and intimating that she should choose a life similar to that of her namesake".⁷ How this was worked out in her life remains obscure unless we examine closely what her brother Gregory understood the character of Thecla to be. In the Fourteenth Homily on the Song of Songs, Gregory specifically mentioned Thecla as a model of a life of perfection through mortification of her body's faculties [J405], bringing Thecla in par with Gregory's own understanding of mystical anthropology.⁸

And there were the portrayal of Macrina as the Virgin *par excellence* and also as the Bride of Christ. These portrayals are the closest to the imageries of the Song of Songs, in fact we will affirm that *Vita Macrina* and *In Canticum Canticorum* not only use the same imageries but also present the same exposition of the theme in Gregory's mystical anthropology.

Gregory also recorded how, at Macrina's death bed, they discussed the future life when mention was made of the great Basil's decease, leading Macrina to play the role of a Christian Socrates, the conversation of which he claimed to faithfully record in *De Anima et Resurrectione*. Thus, Macrina was seen as a Christian sage, but here there is an important difference between a pagan sage and a Christian one like Macrina,⁹ no longer did Macrina talk about life of contemplation leading to the final union with the One, but perfection of the life rather than the pursuit of truth, it is a life of moral virtue that is being emphasized. Moreover, Macrina could show the possibility of such a life through her own, which is well attested by his brother when he describes Macrina as "a woman who raised herself by philosophy to the highest peak of human virtue"¹⁰. Thus even as a Christian sage, Macrina was again living out the theme of his brother's mystical anthropology.

12.2 THEMES AND IMAGERIES COMMON TO *IN CANTICUM CANTICORUM* *CANTICORUM* AND *VITA MACRINAE*

In any attempt to illustrate the nature and assess the extent of one ancient text's influence on another, A. Meredith warns against confining to a search for verbal or phraseological similarities alone, the general context and structure of the texts compared play far more important roles than isolated words or even whole phrase similarities.¹¹ Taking this into consideration, we find that with our present task, the problem does not arise because we are dealing with the works of the same author, and the theme of perfection in virtuous life is a persistent and unifying one in almost all of Gregory's works.

12.2.1 Thecla

A.E.D. Van Loveren maintains that Gregory's intention in mentioning Macrina's secret name as Thecla is to rank his sister with the martyrs.¹² Indeed Gregory does not lack in his praise of martyrs. Several sermons and panegyrics are devoted to them.¹³ But what we witness in *Vita Macrinae* is not of the same category with these panegyrics. Whereas these panegyrics refer mainly to the achievement of the martyrs in the course of orthodoxy, *Vita Macrinae* seems to concentrate on a person living out the Christian ideal in an ascetic way.¹⁴ Indeed as L. Hayne points out, by the fourth Century, Thecla's fame was as martyr rather than virgin.¹⁵ Thus we will have to search for the link between Macrina and Thecla in another way. van Loveren himself provides a clue when he concludes that, "In my opinion, Macrina is a perfect example of the substitution of the monk for

the martyr in the framework of ideas about Christian perfection".¹⁶

Even with the life of Thecla, the emphasis is not on the actual act of martyrdom, but on her determination to mortify her body in order that she might be faithful. And this we believe is the point of focus in Gregory's linking of Macrina with Thecla.

Gregory's concern in saying that by the given secret name, it was actually "foretelling the life of the child and intimating that she would choose a life similar to that of her namesake", is to indicate the similarity in spirit of the two lives, despite differences in detail.¹⁷ Both embrace the life of celibacy as the most perfect lifestyle; both are praised for their ability to teach others on the holy and virginal life,¹⁸ but a summary of the achievement of Thecla in the fourteenth homily on the Song of Songs, in my opinion, is the crux of the intention of Gregory in describing Macrina as a second Thecla. The text is clear:

"Out of desire for the transcendent good, the cares of this life are nullified and put to death. Paul pours this myrrh from his mouth. It is mixed with the pure lily of temperance and fills the ears of that holy virgin (Thekla was her name) who received in her soul these flowing drops. She put the outer man to death and quenched every carnal thought and desire. After Thekla received this salvific teaching, her youth and external beauty died, along with all her body's faculties. The Word alone lived in her. Because of him the entire world was dead for her, and she the virgin had died to the world."
[J405,1-11]¹⁹

Thus the emphasis on Thecla's life is the mortification of the body, "out of desire for the transcendent good". The indwelling of the Word cleanses her of all carnal desire. She, like Peter and a multitude of other saints, "became the Church's common mouth and filled their listeners with

myrrh which mortified their passions and bore fruit with the lilies of the Word" [J405,16-19], lilies signifying purity and truth, and the spiritual, immaterial way of life [J404,1-3]. She becomes a great champion of faith. And this, we suggest, was worked out in the course of Macrina's life, as described in the *Vita Macrinae*.

Gregory has in mind, in Macrina, a statute that not only experiences the indwelling Word but also one who can lead others to that experience, as is true of the description of the Bride in her ascent. Hence there is a close link between the formulation of the ascent of the soul in the Song of Songs and the experience of the saintly person of Macrina.

12.2.2 The Virgin/ Bride

At the beginning of the ninth homily on the Song of Songs, Gregory has this to say, "Every one who does God's will is his brother, sister, and mother and is a chaste virgin joined to the Lord. Such a person sharing the immaculate bridal chamber is rightly called bride."²⁰ The idea of a chaste virgin being called a bride of the Lord is not new to Gregory, but he goes on to relate the idea of sister, spouse, virgin, and bride in quite a unique way. He sees a progression from being called sister to being called bride, describing it as "her increase in beauty". Good works make her a sister of the Lord; she is then "adorned by the fountain of good doctrines"; she in

turn renews herself as "wedded to virginity by a birth from above, and has become the betrothed and bride of her groom".

[J263,9-20].

What is described here mirrors almost exactly the progress in the virtuous life of Macrina as manifested in the *Vita Macrinae*.

Good works characterize the life of Macrina; from her early age onwards, obedience to elders came naturally. She was to become the source of comfort, strength, and advice to those she was in contact with. "Moreover her life became such by God's help that her hands never ceased to work according to the commandment,... Never were petitioners turned away, yet never did she appeal for help, but God secretly blessed the little seeds of her good works till they grew into a mighty fruit".²¹ And as the homily says, the child Macrina's education was such that she was "adorned by the fountains of good doctrines", by devoting herself to the study of the inspired Scripture, in particular to the Wisdom of Solomon and the Psalter which was "her constant companion, like a good fellow-traveller that never deserted her" (VSM 376.18). This was accompanied by constant prayer.

Obedience to parents made her submissive to her father's arrangement of marriage to a young man of good repute. However, the early death of the young man created a providential opportunity for Macrina to keep herself as a chaste virgin, resolving never to leave her mother and remaining as a celibate for her faith.²² And after a lifetime of seeking after virtue and leading other souls on the way, supporting them in time of grief "by her own steadfastness and imperturbability"; and by setting reason

against passion, she was able on her deathbed proclaimed liked the apostle, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith".²³

Gregory mentions a ring containing what was supposedly a fragment of the cross of Christ around Macrina's neck. The ring and its relic were symbols of the pledge of the enduring presence of Christ, her true Bridegroom.²⁴ The virgin Macrina had identified herself as the Bride espoused to Christ. She did not shrink at the departure from this life, instead she "revealed to the bystanders that divine and pure love of the invisible bridegroom, which she kept hidden and nourished in the secret places of the soul, and she published abroad the secret disposition of her heart--

her hurrying towards Him Whom she desired, that she might speedily be with Him, loosed from the chains of the body. For in very truth her course was directed towards virtue, and nothing else could divert her attention".²⁵

Thus the progression from sister to bride is complete.

We saw "her increase in beauty". This idea of "the soul perfected through beauty" finds its echoes throughout the commentary on the Song of Songs. It is as the seventh homily puts it, "When a person has the power of sight [of purity] in the Church, he never looks to what is material and corporeal; a spiritual and immaterial life is effected in him, and his life is formed by the grace of the Holy Spirit". [J219,1-3].

12.2.3 The Soul's Ascent

The doctrine of Epektasis is important to Gregory of Nyssa, and in most of his works, traces of the doctrine are evident. However, we seldom read about it being present in *Vita Macrinae*. A. Meredith implicitly hinted at it in his analysis of that work,²⁶ "Gregory described the last actions of his sister's life and her increasing desire for fellowship with the bridegroom". The doctrine of the soul's ascent is concretised in the life of Macrina. The word ἀπορᾶν is used to describe the action of looking away from all others and thus at one pursued. According to Meredith, Gregory here "deliberately reminds us of the letter of Hebrews and wishes at the same time to insist that the nearest Macrina got to the desired for aim was a straining towards the object of desire without any actual vision of it".²⁷ This is the closest yet statement short of a full fledged exposition of the doctrine of Epektasis in the *Vita Macrinae*. If this conclusion is justified it would be, for Gregory, an excellent example of "the way in which even the noblest of created minds can go no further in their search for God than straining towards him, without ever actually catching sight of him".²⁸ And this is exactly the essence of what Gregory set out to expound in *De Vita Moysis* and *In Canticum Canticorum*.

12.2.4 Other Imageries

The very Plotinian phraseology of human nature being overlaid with the rust of time, waiting to be shaken free to reveal the true gold, is employed by Gregory of Nyssa in *In Canticum Canticorum*, The fourth

homily [J100-J103], with a characteristic twist in the philosophical idea. Human nature was golden at the beginning and shone by reason of its resemblance to the undefiled good (the Creator). However, it became discoloured and blackened by the admixture of vice. What is keeping him from ascending into union with God is the fact that man is inevitably tied down to matter. The ascent of man in the spiritual things must be anchored on the Incarnation. The restoration of the Image (here in the imagery of the pure and undefiled gold), in part, begins with Christ offering the potentiality of this ascent through faith, till immortality is reclaimed.

In *Vita Macrinae*, Macrina is presented again as a piece of refining gold. After a series of deaths in the immediate family, Macrina did not succumb to passion of mourning, although she by no means forbid others to do so:²⁹

" But just as they say that the ^etasting of gold takes place in several furnaces, so that if any impurity escapes the first furnace, it may be separated in the second, and again in the last one all admixture of dross may be purged away--consequently it is the most accurate testing of pure gold if having gone through every furnace it shows no refuse. So it happened also in her case. When her noble character had been tested by these different accessions of trouble, in every respect the metal of her soul was proved to be unadulterated and undefiled" (VSM 386).

Again, in the monastic community that Macrina built,

" These women fell short of the angelic and immaterial nature only in so far as they appeared in bodily form, and were contained within a human frame, and were dependent upon the organs of sense. Perhaps some might even dare to say that the difference was not to their disadvantage. Since living in the body and yet after the likeness of the immaterial beings, they were not bowed down by the weight of the body, but their life was exalted to the skies and they walked on high in

company with the powers of heaven" (VSM 382).

The idea about the spectator in the stand cheering and exhorting the runners in the race is used by Gregory of Nyssa to describe one who, although not in the actual race, nevertheless, is just as eager to see the runners achieving

their goal. In *De Vita Moysis*, he uses it to encourage a "most valued friend and brother", while he is "competing admirably in the divine race along the course of virtue, lightfootedly leaping and straining constantly for the prize of the heavenly calling".³⁰ Here Gregory, as a teacher seems to have a great deal to exhort the runner in the race, *De Vita Moysis* is dedicated to this exercise.

It is therefore fascinating that the same idea is also found in *Vita Macrinae*. This time, however, Gregory's role is being reversed. His is still the spectator's role, but this time it is the runner, Macrina, " who has passed his adversary and already drawn near to the end of the stadium", and while rejoicing inwardly as if she had already attained her object, she turned around and encouraged the sympathizers among the spectators (VSM 392). The race here is more appropriately applied to the pursuit of the life of virtue, the soul's ascent towards union with God.³¹

12.3 THE QUESTION OF THE DATE

If according to Cahill,³² Gregory wrote his Homilies to the Song of Songs not earlier than 391, then the question of the interrelationship

between Gregory's works becomes important in tracing the development of his thought through his works. Daniélou pointed out the interesting parallels between the role of Macrina in *Vita Macrinae* and of the bride/virgin in *In Canticum Canticorum*.³³ And *Vita Macrinae* is a work almost universally attested to be written closely after the death of the saintly lady in 379,³⁴ and if our theory that what appears as mystical anthropology in concept has actually appeared largely as a model lived out by an actual human being in the person of Macrina, then we have a situation in which Gregory of Nyssa's theology is put into realization before it is articulated and elaborated in the form of a commentary or a series of homilies. But consciously or not, the parallel between the two corpus of writings, both in imagery and concept, is too obvious to be ignored.³⁵

12.4 MACRINA AS MODEL

Experience plays an important part in the definition of a mystic. Gregory of Nyssa's mystical anthropology is basically an anthropology of experience of the immediacy with God himself in love. The event of the last hours of Macrina's life vividly portrayed one of Gregory's deepest understanding of man before his Creator. It is an experience that is engulfed in the darkness where God is. Stopping her conversation with the visitor, she entered into the state of prayer. At first, the prayer was audible. It was an inward journey to the light of God and his salvific action, a purifying knowledge of her state from a fallen state to a blameless and

spotless one through her understanding of the Incarnation. Then little by little, her body failed her:" although her voice failed her, with her heart and the movement of her hands, she fulfilled her desire and moved her lips in keeping with the impulse within her". Darkness played a unique role here. The whole world was now covered in darkness as it was evening. And senses no longer deter the heart that reached out to her Beloved. At last, she breathed her last with the prayer. In death, her body was so harmoniously arrayed that it seemed as if she had gone back to her original state of incorruptibility (VSM 399-400).

Momigliano's statement is true of our discovery: " The Life of Macrina is the most accomplished and the least conventional biography he ever wrote, the most closely related to [Gregory's] philosophic meditations".³⁶ He goes on to point out a crucial element in *Vita Macrinae*: that Gregory follows the convention which Athanasius had established in which saints could be compared with biblical figures, but could not be allegorised as could biblical figures, "Saints, even for Gregory of Nyssa, must remain firmly in everyday life".³⁷ If this is true of the life of Macrina, it also implies that Gregory of Nyssa's mystical anthropology is not just a philosophical fantasy, but a down-to-earth examination of the plight of man and how he can overcome it.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWELVE

1. "... and indeed throughout [Gregory's] mystical theology, there is a concern to relate it to the sacramental life of the Church" see Louth, "Mystical Tradition," p.85. It is at this point that the mystical element enters into the premise of his more philosophical doctrine of Man.
2. Cf. Macleod, "Allegory and Mysticism," 362-379.
3. Louth, *Mystical Tradition*, op.cit., p.81.
4. As is very vividly described in the fourth homily of the Song of Songs.
5. Philippians 3:12-14.
6. For *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, see E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, trans R. Mcl. Wilson, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1965), p352ff. and A.E. Clark, *Women in the Early Church*, (Wilmington: Glazier 1983), p77-88. For Methodius's *The Banquet of the Ten Virgins*, see ANF, vol.XIV, p.1-119.
7. VSM 372.1-31. We use Woods-Callahan's translation here, see p164.
8. See below for a fuller treatment of Macrina in the shadow of Thecla's example.
9. See a very helpful analysis of the difference in goal between the pagan philosophy of Porphyry and *De Vita Pythagorica* and that of *Vita Macrina* in A. Meredith, "A Comparison between the Vita Sanctae Macrinae of Gregory of Nyssa, the Vita Plotini of Porphyry and the De Vita Pythagorica of Iamblichus," in *The Biographical Works of Gregory of Nyssa*, (The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation 1984) ed. A. Spira, p181-96.
10. VSM 371.28. See also R. Williams, "Macrina's Deathbed," art.cit., on a helpful clarification of Gregory's Platonism which has become the center of stormy debate about the consistency and harmony of his ideas about humanity.
11. Meredith, "Gregory of Nyssa and Plotinus," pp1120-1126. There, he was dealing with the possible influence of Plotinus on Gregory of Nyssa. The illustration from texts of both authors proves

convincingly that even with similar words or phraseology employed by both, the difference in ideological and theological outlook is the crucial determining factor in the comparison between the two authors. Moreover, Plotinus's, being a prevailing philosophy of the age, would probably produce phraseology that were employed by scholars of repute.

21. A.E.D. van Loveren, "Once Again: 'The Monk and the Martyr,' Saint Anthony and Saint Macrina," SP 17(1982), 532-34.
13. Notably *Sermons on St. Stephen, Panergynic on Gregory Thaumaturgus, In Praise of Theodore the Martyr, and Sermons on the Forty Martyrs*.
14. In fact most scholars place *Vita Macrinae* in the category of Gregory's ascetic writings despite its literary form, in keeping with his principle that, "Each of us is inclined to embrace some course of life with the greater enthusiasm, when he sees personalities who have already gained destination in it. We have therefore made the requisite mention of saints who have gained their glory in celibacy" in the introduction to his *De Virginitate*.
15. L. Hayne, "Thecla and the Christian Fathers," VC 48(1994), 213.
16. Van Loveren, art.cit., 534.
17. The embrace of virginity in both the lives comes from two different intention: Thecla rejected her fiance on the reason that virginity is the most perfect evangelical lifestyle; Macrina was willing to be married, but when the fiance died prematurely before marriage, she regarded herself as still his wife in the eyes of God. Again, Macrina was not subjected to cruel treatment, as Thecla did, in endeavouring to lead the saintly life.
18. Thecla is presented as a learned virgin, proficient in both the Christian doctrine and philosophy (φιλοσοφία ἐγκύκλιος καὶ παιδεία). Evidently later writers saw Thecla in a very different light from the original apocryphal portrayal of the faithful follower of the apostle Paul.
19. In the Acts of Paul and Thecla, Paul taught her, among other things, of the Trinity (chapter 13) and later in chapter 26, when she met Paul again, she was able to recite what he had taught her in a creed.
20. "ὅτι μὲν οὖν πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ κυρίου ἀδελφός αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀδελφὴ καὶ μήτηρ ἐστὶ καὶ ὅτι ἡ ἀρμοσθεῖσα τῷ κυρίῳ παρθένος ἀγνή πρὸς μετουσίαν τῆς ἀχράντου παστάδος νύμφη κυρίως κατονομάζεται," [J263,3-7].

21. VSM 393,24-31. I use Lowther Clarke's translation here.
22. A.D. Momigliano thinks that Macrina's decision to remain faithful to her dead fiancé and never to marry is a case of the love for the earthly fiancé being transformed to the love of the celestial bridegroom, i.e. for Jesus himself; in "The Life of Saint Macrina by Gregory of Nyssa," in J.W. Eade and J. Ober, eds. *The Craft of the Ancient Historian*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan 1975), 217. But this is to see the death of the young man as instrumental to Macrina's decision, a sort of conversion experience, which is not wholly true considering the tradition of remaining a virgin in order to be devoted to Christ was not foreign to Macrina's own family. Therefore we see it as a providential opportunity for Macrina for her fiancé to have died before their marriage. In fact we hear it in her prayer on her deathbed where she claimed her devotion from infancy, "O God everlasting, towards whom my soul has loved with all its strength, to whom I have dedicated my body and my soul from my infancy to now."
22. Cf. II Timothy 4:7.
24. Brown (1988), pp.272-73. The text referred thereto is VSM 424,15-21.
25. Lowther Clarke, pp.54-55.
26. Meredith, "Comparison," op.cit., pp189-92.
27. Ibid., 191.
28. Ibid.
29. See Williams, "Macrina's Deathbed," art.cit. for a particularly useful observation of Macrina's attitude to Gregory's grief after Basil's death as recorded in *De Anima et Resurrectione*.
30. Malherbe and Ferguson's translation (1978), p.29.
32. Van Loveren art.cit., 532-34, see it rather as the triumphant end to a martyr's life.
31. Cahill, "The Date," art.cit., insists that the date of the writing of the Homilies to the Song of Songs must fall on the years between 391 and 394, based on his interpretation of the relationship between Gregory and Olympias (see p.447-51). He concurs with Jean Daniélou on this point, although he differs with the French scholar on the setting of the Homilies.

33. Daniélou, *Platonisme*, op.cot., p426. Callahan(1967) in her introductory note to the translation of *Vita Macrinae* agrees(p.xix).
34. Macrina's death was generally dated on December 379. So the most probable date for the date of the writing of *Vita Macrinae* is early 380. See a fuller discussion in Maraval(1971),p.57-67, where he places the date after 380,"au plus tard de 382-383".
35. We could also include *De Vita Moysis* as well. Two elements justify the comparison: the fact that it was claimed by most scholars to have been written in the early 390s (see Malherbe and Ferguson[1979],p.1-2. For an alternative opinion, see Heine[1975]);and also the fact that "the *Life of Moses* has the most in common with the Canticles commentary", the former strengthens our claim above. Certainly the imagery of the runner and the spectator in the stand, employed both in *Vita Macrinae* (VSM 392,24-36) and in the prologue to *De Vita Moysis*, is the most vivid illustration of our claim, although here, interesting enough, Gregory, the spectator in both cases, plays two different roles, see my analysis below.
36. Momigliano, art.cit., p.208.
37. Ibid. pp.216-17.

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CONCLUSION

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Anthropology is the investigation of man's nature and destiny. With mystical anthropology, the philosophical presuppositions behind the investigation play important role in determining the validity of the experience of man as he realises his potential and sets^s about pursuing it until he reaches that destiny. Theological anthropology is tied up with its understanding of the role of Christ in man's pursuit of his destiny, and mystical anthropology in the Christian mold^u must put that role of Christ at central place for it not to lapse into pure mystical experience devoid of its Christian^s content. In this light, Cattin is right to point out that, "every mystical experience contains the risk of idolatry, as it tries to contain what is in fact uncontainable, thus also constantly tip-toeing on the brim between the barely describable and the ineffable. For to feel confident in manifesting knowledge of the divine means the danger of pinning divinity itself, hence degrading into the sin of idolatry."¹

But Christian anthropology, because it involves the relationship with the divine to fulfill its destiny, necessarily consists of an element of mystery, as God cannot be wholly known by man. So no matter how well a theologian can see himself to formulate^u his doctrine of man according to all the available data, the one important data he inevitably misses is the full knowledge of God. We submit that the very attraction of Gregory of Nyssa's doctrine of man lies precisely in his recognition of this ineffability of God.

This recognition leads Gregory to clothe his anthropology in mystical language. Two paradoxical claims help him to see the nature and destiny of man in a richer light than most. He claims that the soul can be aware of a direct and unmediated knowledge of God and union with him; direct, because of the affinity of its nature with God as proclaimed the image of God; unmediated, because of the necessity of abandoning all sense perception in order to reach out to God through love and faith. The other claim keeps the seemingly positivist perspective in tension. The infinity of God and the finitude of man serve to keep an unbridgeable gulf between the Created and the Uncreated, and this profoundly affects Gregory's mystical anthropology, where he perceiv^e the destiny of man as bridging that gulf and yet recognising that it can never be bridged. This also serves to exclude completely the error which is always haunting the doctrine of deification and the union of man with God. The gulf makes sure that no theory of mystic fusion or transubstantiation of man into the divine is possible.

Again two things prevent the whole of this concept from collapsing into existential despair: the gulf, far from being a hindrance, gives an opportunity to spur on in search of the beautiful vision of God by imitation. On the other hand, in virtue of his being created in the image of God, and like is attracted to like, he can then participate in the divinity of God. Thus the two claims are not mutually exclusive, but in fact holds each other in tension.

The tension of affinity and distancing is already present in Gregory's

earlier philosophical formulations of the doctrine of man, notably in the *De Hominis Opificio*; although then Gregory still remained optimistic about the restoration of the true image and likeness of God in man. So it is to be expected that as the mystical aspect of that restoration is stressed in his later works, the gulf between the Created and the Uncreated comes increasingly to the fore. Hence when we come to examine Gregory's fifteen Homilies on the Song of Songs, we see that the gulf is everywhere stressed. But we also notice some concepts which are mentioned in the philosophical writings begin to exert their meaning in Gregory's mystical contemplation of man. As the scope of this thesis confines itself to the investigation of the Homilies to the Song, we will only highlight those concepts that play a prominent role in the Homilies themselves.

Much has been said about Gregory's dependence on the concept of akolouthia to formulate his mystical theology. Thus the most obvious to look for this correspondance is in his *De Vita Moysis*, where the life of Moses is depicted as a spiritual journey that culminates in the darkness where God is. The sequence is clear enough, unfolding around the three theophanies. But hardly do students of Gregory ever use the *In Canticum Canticorum* as example of the sequential order in which Gregory follows in his mystical writings, perhaps for the following reasons: firstly it is a massive work not easily analysed and secondly, the ^{narrative} ~~historical~~ sequential is missing in the Canticum text. But after attempting the task at hand, we find it yield much fruitful thoughts, not least for it brings out richer nuances in the mystical formulation of the restoration of man. Gregory does not even have to resort

to any artificial structure outside of the bare Canticle text itself. He sees the spiritual meaning built in to the canonical text so much so that it can be compared with the blending of divinity and humanity in the act of the Incarnation itself.

The process of akolouthia is such that we can witness the order of the soul's ascent by following the order of the text closely. This Gregory does from Canticle 1:1 to 6:9, describing the ascent as advancing but unending, every stage is but a preparation for a new beginning.

Through it all, three concepts come to be intertwined: the Incarnation, the divine indwelling and the role of the Church. The realm of creation receives the coming of God through the Incarnate Christ bringing the very life of God to man by indwelling in him. Thus the process of restoration of the image and the likeness of God in man begins by this divinising act and by the participation of the soul in virtue.

By entering temporal history in the Incarnation, God has experienced otherness. The Created is now being embraced in the Uncreated. In virtue of the Incarnation, the eternal and the ineffable God becomes intimately related to man, who now takes up residence in the realm of everlasting harmony with the divine life. And because this is an everlasting harmony within the everlasting divine life, the participating within that divine life logically requires an eternal progress. The journey necessarily requires the gradual abandonment of all sense perceptions which are only hindrances to the soul's vision of God. This mystical experience is therefore a wounded experience, (Gregory uses the Canticle text, "I am wounded with love,"

perfectly here), it is directed towards the One who brought it into being and whom it always finds lacking in substantial revelation. It is also the experience of knowing that it is impossible to live without this God whom it always seem to lack. But the redeeming feature is the deep penetration of the divine in indwelling humanity. (Thus the Wound is the healing!)

However, Gregory always sees this experience in the context of the Church in mutual exhortation to the good. The soul finds its nourishment for the ascent in the Church through her teaching and the sacraments; The Church sees in the exalted soul the paradigm of her own potential to attain her true glory, and both are under the headship of Christ, until Christ is all in all. Thus anthropology reaches out to embrace ecclesiology.

And one paradigm that the Church draws its strength and assurance is the life of one great Saint, Macrina, who has attained that glory and yet continues to seek.

In formulating his mystical anthropology, Gregory draws from the rich heritage left behind by Origen; but unlike Origen, he emphasized the distancing of God and man; thus instead of mysticism of light, Gregory guides the soul into the darkness where God is.

Gregory does not finish his interpretation of the Song of Songs. Some of the reasons put forward include the postulation that the Origenist controversy is looming and it was not expedient to continue with this line of interpretation, especially because his last homilies hints of the doctrine of apokatastasis. Perhaps it is just as natural to the flow of Gregory's thought on the eternal progress that he leaves the commentary unfinished

as another witness to this unending quest.

1. Y. Cattin, "The Christian Rule of Mystical Experience," in *Mysticism and the Institutional Crisis*, C. Duquoc and G. Gutierrez eds. (Concilium, London:SCM Press 1994), p12.

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